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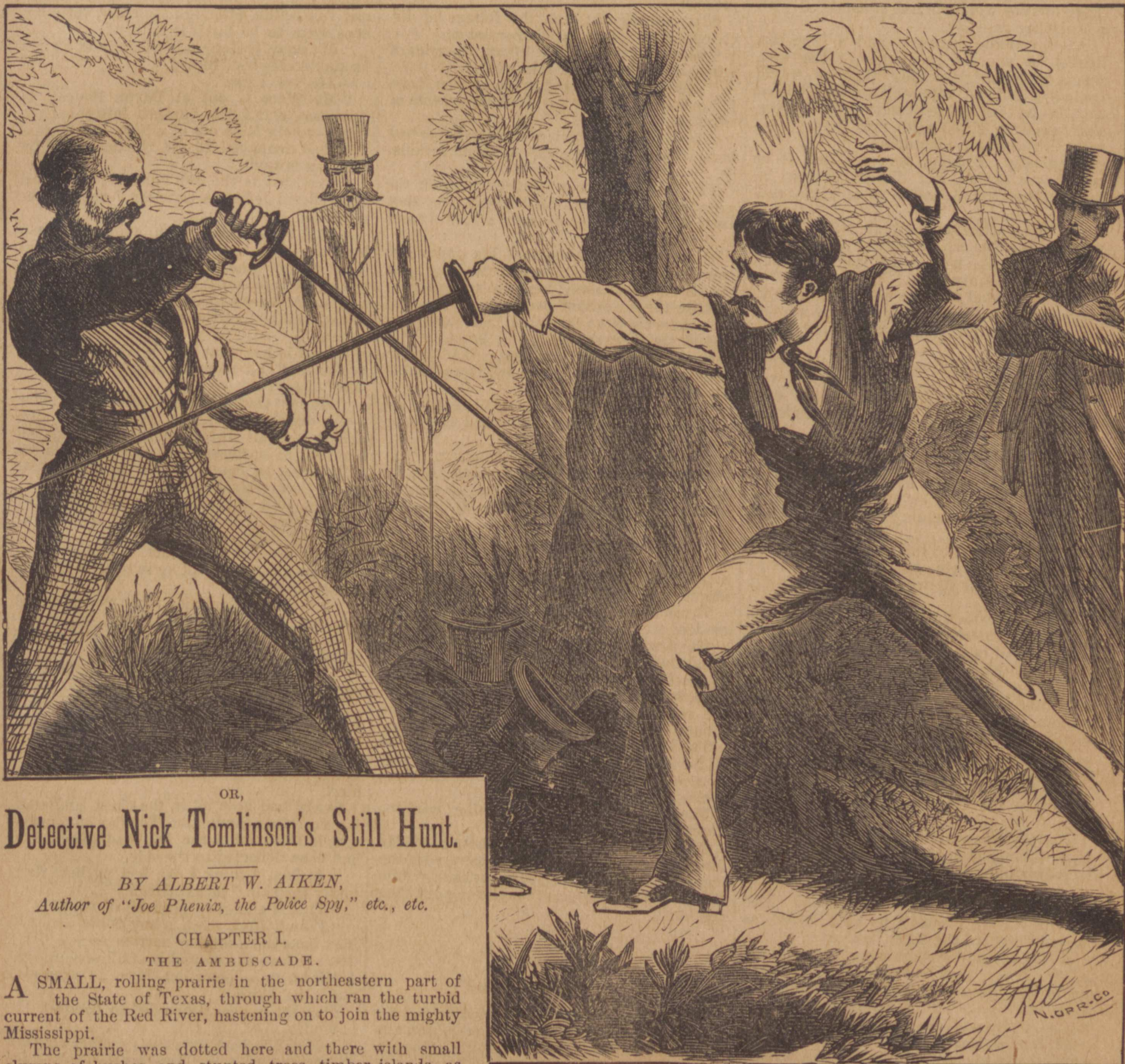
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THE NEW YORKER AMONG TEXAS SPORTS;



OR,

Detective Nick Tomlinson's Still Hunt.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

Author of "Joe Phenix, the Police Spy," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMBUSCADE.

A SMALL, rolling prairie in the northeastern part of the State of Texas, through which ran the turbid current of the Red River, hastening on to join the mighty Mississippi.

The prairie was dotted here and there with small clumps of bushes and stunted trees, timber islands, as the natives of the region call them.

NOTHING WAS HEARD BUT THE WHIZZING, STRIKING SOUND OF THE SWORDS.

Over the prairie wound a faint trail, and along this trail, on a bright May morning, rode a horseman.

He was a man of thirty, or thereabouts, a gentleman of birth and breeding, to judge from his appearance.

A well-knit, muscular figure, a long, oval face, with high cheek-bones, peculiar grayish green eyes, which appeared to be jet-black a little ways off, sallow complexion, and a massive under jaw, which seemed to indicate that he was possessed of an unusual amount of courage and resolution.

A long, thin mustache fringed his upper lip, jet black in hue, as was his hair, which he wore rather long and "clubbed," over his ears in the fashion rather common to the men of the Southwest.

He was dressed in the careless style affected by the educated men of the region: black pantaloons, a black Prince Albert coat, no vest, so that the carefully ruffled white shirt could be seen in all its glory, and a soft, broad-brimmed slouch hat.

This was Alexander Tourjay, one of the leading citizens of Bowie county, Texas.

Tourjay was a lawyer by profession, but also ran a plantation on the Red River, just outside the flourishing village of Sulphurville, which, owing to its favorable location, being on the river, with a splendid country surrounding it, bid fair to become the largest town in the county after Texarkana.

Tourjay was one of the best known men in the region. Being the son of a wealthy father, who had died just after Alexander attained his majority, he had inherited a large fortune which he had squandered with astonishing rapidity.

An inveterate gamester, and a desperate duelist, it was the prediction of the wise men of the neighborhood that he would come to a bad end, although it was admitted that he had undoubted talent as a lawyer, and was also gifted with rare good judgment in running a plantation.

Personally, Tourjay was inclined to be rather overbearing, and disagreeable, so he had but few friends and a great many enemies.

On this particular morning when we introduce the fire eating lawyer to the notice of our readers he was on his way to attend court at the county seat.

Having started early he was riding slowly, allowing his horse to choose its own gait, being busy in meditation over an important law case.

A hundred feet or so ahead of the horse frisked a hunting-dog, which had followed its master, refusing on this occasion to obey the command of the lawyer to remain at home.

The horseman was suddenly roused from his meditation by a growl from the dog. The beast had halted abruptly in the trail, and, with the hair on his back upraised, was growling at a clump of bushes around which the trail ran.

"Hello! what does this mean?" exclaimed Tourjay, checking his horse, and at the same time reaching for the revolver belted to his waist.

The answer to the question came in the shape of a fusillade of revolver-shots from the clump of bushes which the dog was regarding with so much suspicion.

The dog was hit, and killed outright by one of the shots, dropping dead in his tracks, while another of the bullets cut through the shoulder of the horse.

The animal made a sudden plunge, and although the lawyer was a magnificent rider, yet he was unseated by the movement and thrown to the ground, the horse galloping off.

Tourjay was adroit enough to escape injury, falling upon his side, then immediately rolling over upon his face.

Out from the clump of shrubbery, from whence the shots had come, rushed three men; revolvers gleamed in their hands as they ran toward the fallen lawyer.

But as the new-comers were keen-sighted fellows before they had taken ten steps they made the discovery that Tourjay had not been hurt by the fall, although he was lying upon his stomach, as motionless as a dead man, but he had his revolver out, and was grimly waiting until his assailants should come within easy range.

The moment the three became aware of

this fact they came to an abrupt halt, and then suddenly darted behind a clump of bushes which was at hand to the right of them.

They evidently feared to attack the one man.

A laugh of derision came from Tourjay's lips.

"Well, well; it strikes me that you three are the biggest cowards I have run across in a dog's age!" the lawyer cried. "Three to one, and you don't dare to face the music; but I'll soon have you out of that!"

Then springing to his feet Tourjay took a few steps forward, just as if he really intended to charge the three and drive them from their shelter.

And the others had a sufficiently good opinion of the man as to lead them to believe that he would not hesitate to put a scheme of this kind in execution, so they prepared to offer a desperate resistance.

But, rash and impetuous as was the fighting lawyer he had no idea of attempting to oppose one revolver against three, particularly when the foe had the advantage of cover.

His onward movement was but a ruse so as to gain the shelter of a thicket of stunted oaks which grew by the side of the trail, some ten feet in advance of the spot where he had been so abruptly dismounted.

And as soon as he gained the shelter of these scrubs his scornful laugh rung out on the clear air.

"Now, then, the conditions are a little more even!" he exclaimed; "and as we are within range we can indulge in some pistol-practice!"

And, peering through the foliage he discharged six shots in rapid succession.

Two of the bullets took effect, for cries of mingled rage and pain followed.

"Aha! I have winged some of you, have I?" called out the lawyer, in fierce accents of triumph.

It was the truth; two of the assailants had been wounded, but neither of them seriously.

The three had been crouching upon the ground; one man had his left ear-lobe shot away while the other received a flesh wound in the shoulder.

Tourjay, anticipating that his opponents would endeavor to escape by crouching near the ground, had aimed his shot accordingly.

After the six bullets had been discharged the others thought their time had come, and unless the lawyer carried a brace of revolvers, which was not likely, he was in their power, for all the cartridges in his weapon had been exploded.

With fierce cries of rage the three left the shelter of the bushes and rushed headlong toward the scrub-oaks.

Tourjay placidly awaited the onset.

He did not have a second revolver, but he did have a box of cartridges, and as soon as he had emptied his revolver he deftly proceeded to recharge the weapon.

This he accomplished before the three got out of cover for their rush, and then with as much deliberation as though he was in a shooting gallery he opened fire on them.

Three shots he discharged in rapid succession.

The first was a miss, the second struck the man at whom it was aimed in the right arm, a glancing shot which inflicted only a slight flesh wound, but compelled the man to drop the revolver which he was flourishing as though it had suddenly become red hot.

The third shot was the most effective of all for it hit the third man in the breast, causing him to pitch forward on his face, coming down like a log.

The warmth of this reception was too much for the assailants.

The uninjured man fired a shot, a wildly directed one, and then, in company with the other, turned and fled, panic-stricken, while the lawyer's triumphant laugh rung out clear and shrill.

CHAPTER II.

A DARING GAMESTER.

THE three had horses concealed behind the thicket of timber, where they had lain in ambush, and to these steeds hastening at the top of their speed, they mounted and rode away in hot haste.

"You are a pair of cowards!" Tourjay cried in derision; "two to one, and yet you don't dare to fight it out!"

But the words fell upon unheeding ears; all that the two ruffians thought of was of getting away from the dangerous locality as soon as possible.

Tourjay watched them for a few minutes as they raced at break-neck speed over the rolling prairie.

"No danger of those fellows returning," he murmured; "they have got all they want, and it is not likely that after this lesson I will be troubled by them again."

Then Tourjay thrust his revolver back into its holster, first taking the precaution to recharge it, and proceeded to look after the man whom his pistol bullet had laid low.

"I think this fellow is a stranger to me," the lawyer remarked as he advanced toward him, "for I don't remember to have ever seen him before, and yet—his face is certainly familiar."

The man was not dead, as Tourjay supposed, for, as the lawyer rolled him over on his back, he groaned and opened his eyes.

He was a middle aged person of forty-eight or fifty, and from his appearance evidently a planter—in a small way.

"How goes it?" Tourjay asked, as the other looked up in his face.

"I am afraid you have salivated me for keeps!" the wounded man replied with another groan.

"Well, you certainly brought your fate upon yourself. But, why did you join in this attack on me? You are a stranger, I think, for I do not remember to have ever met you before, although your face certainly does seem to be familiar to me."

"My name is Benjamin Sicard and I am a brother to Michael Sicard."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"My place is out at Bayou Bodeau in Arkansas, and I jest jumped into this hyer thing to help Mike out of a hole, 'cos he said you had managed to get the deadwood on him in a lawsuit."

"Yes, that is the old fight between him and Colonel Jefferson Garrison," the lawyer remarked.

"The lawsuit has been going on for a long time. It is about a sum of five thousand dollars; the money has been ordered to be paid into court, and the odds are about a thousand to one the decision of the judge to-day will be that the money belongs to the colonel."

"That is jest what Mike's lawyer told him yesterday," the wounded man assented in a doleful way.

"He said that Mike didn't stand any show—the decision would be given ag'in' him, and it was all owing to the way you had handled the business. Mike allowed that the only thing he could do for to git square would be to salivate you."

"Yes, but the salivating process didn't work according to calculations," the lawyer remarked, drily.

"You are right fer a fact!" I reckon that I will never be fool enuff ag'in to git mixed up in sich an affair.

"It was my calculation when you plugged me that I had got it for keeps, but, somehow, I feel jest now as if there was a heap of life in me."

"I will make an examination," Tourjay suggested.

"I am not much of a doctor, but I think I can tell whether you are so badly hurt or not."

The wounded man said he would be very much obliged if the lawyer would be so kind.

Sicard had been bit in the chest, and making a careful examination, Tourjay announced that in his opinion the ball had struck a rib and been deflected to the side.

"In fact, I think I can feel it here right under the skin," he explained.

"That is a mighty good bit of news!"

"I don't think there is any doubt about it. You have had a mighty narrow escape, for I don't believe the wound is at all serious, but I will hurry a doctor out here as soon as I reach the town."

Then the lawyer proceeded to bandage the wound.

"It will be best for you to remain here until the doctor comes," Tourjay decided, "for if I attempted to transport you into the town

it might set the wound to bleeding, and, possibly, there would be trouble."

"Yes, that will do all right," the wounded man responded. "Tell old Sawbones to git a good ready on and hustle out hyer as soon as he kin!"

Tourjay then proceeded to catch his horse who was grazing a few hundred yards away.

The wound which the animal had received did not amount to anything, having just scratched the skin, so the lawyer was able to proceed on his way.

Tourjay uttered a sigh of regret as he passed the body of the dog.

"Poor beast! He gave his life to save mine! If it had not been for his timely warning, I would, undoubtedly, have ridden into that ambush, and the fellows would have riddled me, before I could have got my gun out."

"People may talk as they please about luck, but there is certainly a deal of it floating around in this world."

"If the dog had not insisted upon coming with me this morning, and if I had not been too indolent to drive him back, the chances are great that I would now be lying where that poor beast reposes."

Tourjay was not the man to give way to sentiment, though, and by the time he reached the county seat he had entirely forgotten about the dog.

The case of Garrison against Sicard was just being called when Tourjay entered the court.

The lawyer for Sicard rose and said that he had nothing further to advance in regard to the case, explaining that he had expected to have a consultation with his client on that morning, but for some reason to him unknown Sicard had not made his appearance.

"Your client was too busily engaged in fixing an ambush for me on Long Prairie to have time to consult with you," Tourjay remarked bluntly to the amazement of the hearers.

"He knew, your Honor, that his case hadn't a leg to stand on," the lawyer added, addressing the judge.

"And so in order to get square he, with his brother, Benjamin, and his son, Tony, made an attempt to wipe me off the face of the earth."

"Well, I was really afraid that my client might do something desperate, for he was in a very angry mood when I parted with him yesterday," the other lawyer explained.

"I trust though that you will not fall into the error of thinking that I had anything to do with the matter, for I would be the last man in the world to counsel violence."

"Oh, I feel sure in regard to that, for a man of your sagacity, Brother Wolfe, would never be guilty of making such a mistake," Tourjay responded with a polite bow.

Then the judge announced that his decision was in favor of Garrison and ordered the five thousand dollars in dispute to be paid over to Tourjay.

The plaintive in the case, Colonel Jefferson Garrison, a fat, jolly, old Red River planter, a man of sixty-five, but a stout and hearty old buck, as he was won't to term himself, was delighted at the result.

Client and lawyer adjourned to the hotel to have a settlement.

The colonel called for a private room and a couple of cocktails.

After the two were seated and the cocktails disposed of, the lawyer counted over the money.

"You handled the case magnificently!" the colonel declared.

"Yes, I think I did do pretty well."

"Now, how much is your bill?"

"Well, a thousand would be about right I think."

"What? a thousand dollars! You don't mean it?" the old gentleman exclaimed, in utter amazement.

"Yes, that is the sum. By rights I ought to make it twelve hundred and fifty, but I am not going to stand on a couple of hundred dollars with a man like yourself," the lawyer declared, in his careless way.

"Oh, come now, Tourjay, you ought not to put it to me quite as steep as that," the colonel expostulated.

"I think that four hundred would be a mighty big fee."

"Oh, no, it is a thousand or nothing. If you don't want to pay a thousand I will

make you a present of the amount," the lawyer responded, with a magnificent air of indifference.

"No, no! I don't want it that way. I am willing to pay a good fee, but I really think that when you tax me a thousand you are raising the ante a leetle too high."

"I will tell you what I will do!" Tourjay exclaimed, abruptly. "I will throw dice with you to see whether I take a thousand or take nothing."

"It is a go!" the old colonel replied, immediately.

"A game of that kind just suits me, for I have a deal of sport blood in my veins."

"A single cast of the dice, highest throw to win."

"That will suit me all right," the old gentleman declared.

The two adjourned to the bar-room.

There were half a dozen lawyers there.

In the frank, hospitable way, common to the old-time Southern gentleman, the colonel invited all present to "smile" at his expense.

Then, after the liquor was drank, Tourjay called for the dice, which he and the colonel proceeded to shake, the bystanders watching the operation with a deal of interest.

Tourjay suggested that as the colonel was his senior he was entitled to the first throw. Garrison threw twelve.

"That is two-thirds—not so bad," the old gentleman observed, complacently.

"I will go you a hundred that I beat you!" the lawyer exclaimed, defiantly.

"Oh, no, no side issue!" the colonel replied. "We will stick to the main thing."

It was a lucky thing for Tourjay that the old gentleman did not accept his banter, for when the lawyer rattled the dice upon the bar all the spots footed up was ten.

"Aha! I have beaten you by two points!" the colonel cried.

"I will go you again for five hundred!" Tourjay exclaimed.

"Done!" responded the old planter.

Again the lawyer lost.

Tourjay scribbled out an I. O. U. for the amount, which he gave to the colonel.

"What do you say to a try for a thousand?" Tourjay asked.

"No, no!" the colonel responded, decidedly. "I am always willing to give a man his revenge, but luck is not running your way to-day so I must beg you to excuse me at present."

"All right! come up, gentlemen, and have a drink," the lawyer exclaimed; an invitation which was promptly accepted.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW YORKER.

At the precise moment when the colonel and the lawyer began this duel with the dice the court, wherein Tourjay had won his triumph, adjourned for the day.

Nathan Wolfe, the young lawyer who had been Tourjay's opponent, gathered up his books and took his way to the hotel.

Both Wolfe and Tourjay had offices in Texarkana, and when they came to the county seat made their headquarters at the hotel.

When Wolfe reached the inn the appearance of a young gentleman in the doorway caused him to utter an exclamation of surprise.

This person was a man of twenty-five, or thereabouts, a handsome, well-built fellow, a little above the medium size and splendidly proportioned.

He had a frank and open face, regular features, lit up by extremely expressive gray eyes, and his square, set chin betokened that the owner of it possessed a wonderful amount of resolution.

He was neatly dressed in a dark business suit and bore the appearance of a man who was tolerably well-to-do.

The stranger uttered an exclamation of surprise as soon as he beheld the young lawyer.

"Nathan Wolfe by all that's lucky!" he cried.

"Harvey De Berry as I am a sinner!" Wolfe exclaimed.

And then the two shook hands in the warmest manner.

"You are about the last man I expected

to see," Wolfe remarked. "What brings you down here all the way from New York?"

"A truant disposition, good my lord" maybe, as we used to spout in our old college days at Harvard."

The two had been fellow students at the great eastern college.

"Well, old fellow, I am deuced glad to see you, no matter what brings you to this neck of the woods."

"But come up-stairs to my room where we can talk in peace," the young lawyer continued.

"If we should attempt to hold a conversation here, we would be apt to have half the town gaping in wonder at us before we had been at it for five minutes."

The two proceeded to Wolfe's room, and, after they were comfortably seated, the young lawyer said:

"Let me see, it is about five years since we left college."

"Yes, just about, I to go into the brokerage business with my father, and you to practice law, but I thought you intended to settle in Memphis, your native place."

"The field there was crowded so I came down here where I have succeeded in establishing a good paying practice, although I am very far from making a fortune yet."

"Well, I have been tolerably successful, and was so devoted to business that I thought of but little else until last winter when at Washington I happened to encounter a young lady from this region, Miss Alberta Whaley."

"Oh, yes, Judge Whaley's daughter."

"I fell over head and ears in love with the lady at the first sight, and I have an impression that she regarded me with a favorable eye."

"She is a fine girl!"

"When we parted I told her that as soon as I could arrange my business I would pay a visit to this section of the country, and she was pleased to invite me to call upon her."

"Then you have really made this long journey with the hope of winning the girl?"

"Exactly, and I think there is a chance for me, too, for the lady confessed to me that she was not engaged to any one."

Wolfe shook his head and a grave look appeared on his face.

"What is the matter—rocks ahead, eh?" the young New Yorker asked.

"Yes, you have a rival for the hand of the lady, and a most desperate and determined fellow he is too."

"My dear fellow, I did not come down here expecting to have a walk-over for such a prize as this," De Berry responded.

"If you have been favored by Miss Alberta's acquaintance you must know that she is one girl picked out of ten thousand," the young man added.

"And then, too, the fact that she is Judge Whaley's daughter—his only child—and the judge is reported to be worth a million or so does not make her any the less attractive."

"But that would not influence a man like yourself, for you have plenty of money of your own, and if you hadn't, you are not inclined to be mercenary unless you have changed greatly."

"You are right; it is the girl who attracts me, and not her money, but I am not surprised when you tell me that I have a rival. In fact, I wouldn't be astonished to learn that I had a half a dozen of them."

"The man of whom I speak is called Alexander Tourjay, a lawyer by profession, a good-looking, gentlemanly sort of a fellow, and really possessed of remarkable talents."

"A rival of that kind is not to be sneezed at."

"I am not exaggerating the man's talents in the least; he is a courtly, brilliant fellow, and although he has only been practicing a few years is regarded as one of the leading lawyers of this section."

"Then, too, another important fact to be taken into consideration by you is that he is a great favorite of old Judge Whaley who believes that he has the making of a very great man in him."

"That is important, indeed," the New Yorker remarked, thoughtfully. "To have the good opinion of the father in a matter of this kind is a great advantage indeed."

"And now that I have posted you in regard to the man's good qualities, and how favorably he is situated, I will give you the reverse of the picture."

"Aha! there is a reverse then? I am glad to learn that!" De Berry exclaimed, his face lighting up.

"Yes, there is. Tourjay is a willful, obstinate man, with a violent temper, who does not get along with his associates."

"He is a spendthrift, a hard drinker and a most desperate gambler."

"You really amaze me!" the New Yorker exclaimed.

"I am not telling you anything but the exact truth. I do not underrate the man's talents and virtues, or exaggerate his weaknesses and vices."

"That is right; in a case of this kind it is important to know the exact truth."

"He inherited a handsome estate from his father; it has all been squandered with the exception of the home plantation which is so tied up that he cannot dispose of it."

"By his legal labors he makes a handsome amount yearly, but the man is always in debt, for he lives extravagantly; then, too, he is an inveterate gambler, and, as a rule, a most unlucky one."

"Such a man as that would speedily run through any fortune, no matter how large it was."

"That is true enough, and he is one of the happy-go-lucky fellows, too, who never seems to worry. Creditors do not appear to have the power to annoy him, and he laughs as gayly when he loses as when he wins."

"But the judge cannot surely know what kind of a man this Tourjay is or else he would not think that he is a fit associate for his daughter," the New Yorker urged.

"Well, the judge is a very peculiar man," the other replied, slowly.

"In the first place he is well advanced in years—one of the old stock, you understand, and as he in his day sowed a liberal quantity of wild oats, he is inclined to regard Tourjay's shortcomings with a lenient eye."

"I am surprised at that."

"Of course, I don't believe that he has any idea of how wild the man really is, or else he, probably, would not think him to be a fit associate for his daughter."

"And how does the girl regard Tourjay? for no matter what the father may think about the man it is the daughter who will make the final choice, unless I have made a great mistake in regard to her disposition."

"I do not think she is particularly impressed by him. There are a half-a-dozen young fellows all contending for her smiles, and as far as I have seen she does not appear to care any more for one than she does for the others."

"There is a chance for me then?"

"Oh, yes, but if it becomes apparent to the world at large that the lady favors you, then I am certain you will have trouble with Tourjay for he is just the kind of man to attempt to draw you into a quarrel."

"Well, although I should hate to become involved in an affair of that kind yet I think I will be able to take care of myself," the New Yorker remarked with a confident smile.

"You certainly ought to, for you were the champion all-around athlete at college."

"And I have not neglected to keep myself in good condition even though I have been in active business life, for I think that a sound body makes a wise head."

"Quite right, undoubtedly. But you will have to keep your eyes open for this fellow if any trouble does occur, for he is known to be a desperate duelist; that is the way they arrange things down in this section, you know."

"Yes, I comprehend; this is the region where the code of honor flourishes."

"Exactly, and I don't mind telling you that in my opinion it is a barbarous practice."

"That is my idea about the matter," the New Yorker observed in a thoughtful way.

"But it puts a man in a regular hole to have such notions down in this country," Wolfe observed. "For if a man is challenged, and refuses to fight, then the people regard him as lacking in courage."

"That is true."

"This Tourjay is a desperate fellow enough; to illustrate, this morning he was ambushed by three men as he was coming to

town and contrived to lay one fellow low and put the others to flight."

"He is evidently a man of metal and I will have to look out for him," De Berry remarked. "One thing is certain though, and that is I am not going to give up the girl, if I can get her, even if a dozen southern fire-eaters stood in the way!"

Then the two friends fell to conversing about the old times at college and so we leave them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVE.

THE shades of night had fallen upon the town.

Supper was over at the hotel, and the guests of the tavern were lounging around the bar-room, or occupied seats upon the piazza in front of the building.

Judge Whaley and Alexander Tourjay were sitting together at the extreme end of the piazza, some distance from the others, so they could converse without danger of their words being overheard.

The judge was a short, thick-set man with prominent features, iron-gray hair and a bushy beard of the same hue.

He had just reached sixty years, but being a hale, hearty, well-preserved man, was in full possession of all his faculties.

The judge had just taken a seat by the lawyer's side when we introduce them to our reader's notice.

"What is this I hear about your having a duel royal in the betting line with Colonel Garrison?" the judge asked.

"Yes, we did have a little amusement in that line."

"And is it true that he won five thousand dollars from you?"

"Nonsense! nothing of the kind! How strange it is that such reports can get around!"

And then Tourjay, in the frankest manner possible, related the particulars of the affair.

"The old skinflint!" the judge exclaimed.

"I thought the colonel had more sense!"

"The fee you asked was not at all unreasonable, but it is just the way with men like the colonel. They are always in a terrible hurry to get a lawyer to take their cases, but after the battle is won they haggle about the paying of the fee."

"But it seems to me that you were rather unwise to go to gambling with the colonel," and the judge pursed up his lips, shook his head and looked wise.

"I have a little failing in that way, and, being annoyed at the man's meanness in trying to beat me down, I did, perhaps, act rather rashly."

"My dear fellow, you most certainly did!" the judge declared.

"Now, you will not take it amiss, I hope, if I utter a few warning words?"

"Oh, no, not at all!"

"You are a young man while I am an old one, and consequently have seen more of life than you have, and I can tell you, my dear fellow, that one of the greatest mistakes a man can make is to allow himself to become a victim to the gaming habit."

"There is no doubt about that, judge; it goes without saying, to use the French adage. That and a taste for liquor will ruin the best man in the world."

"My dear Tourjay, I am very glad to see that you comprehend the extent of the danger, and I trust that you will have strength of mind enough to resist both temptations!" the old gentleman exclaimed earnestly.

"Of course I am aware that I am taking a liberty in offering you advice on this subject, but I will say that my action is prompted by a sincere interest in your welfare."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend that," Tourjay hastened to declare.

"You have always treated me with the utmost kindness, judge, and I assure you that I appreciate it."

"Well, my dear Tourjay, I will say that in my judgment you have the making of a great lawyer, and I think it would be a shame if you allowed any temptation to interfere with your progress."

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, judge, and I assure you that I will do my best to retain it. I presume that I am a little wild and heedless at times, but

I am not a slave to the gaming or drink habit, and in the future I promise you that I will keep a close watch upon myself."

"My dear fellow, I am very glad, indeed, to hear you say that, for it would be a pity for a man as gifted as yourself to be led away."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a stranger who came from the hotel and approached the group evidently with the idea of taking a chair which stood near the two.

The new-comer was a well-built man of forty five or thereabouts, with such strongly defined features as to suggest that he was of Jewish descent.

He recognized Judge Whaley immediately, and as soon as he called the old gentleman by name the judge recognized him.

"Well, well, you are about the last man that I expected to see!" the judge remarked.

"I am up here on a little matter of business," the new-comer replied. "And I am very glad to have met you, judge, for I do not doubt that you can give me some valuable information."

And then he looked at Tourjay in such a way that it was evident he desired an introduction.

"Allow me, Mr. Tourjay, to make you acquainted with Mr.—Mr—" and as the judge hesitated the stranger exclaimed:

"Tomlinson—Nicodemus Tomlinson!" and the man made an elaborate bow.

"Allow me to offer you one of my cards."

Then the stranger presented a bit of pasteboard to Tourjay.

The card set forth that Mr. Nicodemus Tomlinson conducted a private detective bureau with his principal office in the city of New Orleans, and it was promised that any business in the detective line intrusted to his care would be executed with neatness and dispatch.

"You are not particular then about keeping your identity a secret?" Judge Whaley asked.

"Oh, no!" the detective replied as he helped himself to a vacant chair.

"That is the old-fashioned way of doing business, you know. Sometimes, of course, there are cases when it is absolutely necessary for the men who are handling them to keep in the background, but, as a rule, I think better work can be done in the other way."

"Well, you certainly ought to be a judge about that sort of thing," the old gentleman observed.

"I have had considerable experience, if that goes for anything," the detective assented, speaking in a way which seemed to indicate that he had an extremely good opinion of himself.

Tourjay arched his brows slightly as though he was inclined to doubt the detective's abilities.

"Are you up in this quarter on professional business?" Judge Whaley asked. "But perhaps I am indiscreet in asking the question," he added.

"Oh, no! not at all!" Tomlinson replied.

"I am not afraid to trust a man like yourself with the secret, particularly as I expect to secure some information from you."

"Ah, yes, I see," and the judge nodded.

"As an inhabitant of this region you are aware, of course, that during the past year there have been some bold and extensive robberies committed, the perpetrators of which have never been discovered."

"Yes, that is correct," the judge replied.

"The robberies have all taken place within fifty miles of the city of Texarkana, and owing to the fact that the three States of Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas all come together near that town, the robber, or robbers—there seems to be a doubt whether there is one or a band engaged in the outrages—have been able to operate in all three States."

"That circumstance has not escaped the observation of the people in this neighborhood," the judge observed.

"Complaint has been made to the proper authorities, but as the constables, and sheriffs, of the three different counties in the three different states do not seem to be able to accomplish anything, for according to their own statements, they have not secured a single clue, the governors of these three States, spurred on by the complaints of the

victims, gave the case into my hands, and that is what brings me here.

"Now, judge, if either you, or this gentleman," and he bowed to Tourjay, "can give me any information I shall be glad to receive it."

Judge Whaley shook his head, and the young lawyer followed his example.

"No information, eh?" and the detective looked disappointed.

"I do not think that any one can give you anything new about the matter," the old gentleman responded. "Nothing, you understand, beyond what has been published in the newspapers."

"Well, what is the prevailing opinion? Are the robberies the work of one man or of a gang?"

"That is a matter which has been debated very extensively," the judge answered. "Some people believe that one man is at the bottom of all the mischief, while just as many more are sure that the robberies are the work of a cleverly organized gang."

"What is your own opinion, judge?" Tomlinson asked.

"The judgment of an able lawyer, like yourself, used to sifting facts, and weighing evidence, is worth far more than the opinion of half a hundred ordinary men."

"Well, in my judgment, it is wrong to charge all these robberies on one man, or one set of men," Judge Whaley replied.

"Some of the outrages were certainly perpetrated by one man, while others are apparently the work of a gang, but of one thing about the robberies I am convinced, and that is they have all been committed by a man, or a set of men, who knew exactly how the land lay before a commencement was made."

"In each and every case the victim had a large sum of money, and the attack was planned in such a way that I am certain the attackers had a perfect knowledge both in regard to the ground and all the habits of the victim."

"No strangers then did the work?" the detective asked.

"Not to my thinking," Whaley replied.

"Well, I suppose, like all other neighborhoods, you have your share of worthless fellows who would rather steal than work," Tomlinson remarked in a meditative manner.

"Oh, yes, bacon, corn, hog and chicken thieves, a dozen or so, maybe, are presumed to get the best part of their living from their neighbors, but there are none of them capable of committing these bold robberies; such is the general opinion, you understand," the judge added.

"Ah, yes, I see, it is going to be a difficult case," the detective remarked with an extremely wise look. "But I don't doubt that I will get a clue in time. Much obliged, judge, for the information, and to you, too, sir."

Then the detective arose made an elaborate bow and sauntered away.

The judge and Tourjay watched him until he disappeared within the hotel, then they looked at each other and shook their heads. Evidently, the detective had not impressed them.

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE GAME.

"He is quite a character," Tourjay suggested.

"Oh, yes, an odd genius."

"Does he bear the reputation of being a good detective?"

"Well, I have heard him highly commended, but that is all I know of the man."

"Doesn't it strike you that he is acting in a rather peculiar manner in this case?"

"Of course, I am not a detective, and therefore cannot be supposed to know much of anything about the business," the lawyer added. "Still, it seems to me that common sense is as important in the detective business as in any other one, and if I were going to undertake a case of this kind, I certainly should not take pains to allow everybody to know what was my business."

"It certainly seems imprudent to me, still it may be possible that he supposed we would not say anything about the matter, although he did not take the trouble to ask us to refrain from mentioning the subject."

"He spoke very freely and from what he

said I should imagine that did not care if all the people in the town knew his errand."

"Yes, one would be apt to get an impression of that kind."

"Well, that may be the proper way to handle the case, but I do not think so!" the lawyer exclaimed, decidedly.

"The man, or men who did the robberies are either in this neighborhood, or else they have their agents who will be sure to give the information that a detective is on the ground."

"Exactly! that is the idea which occurred to me!" the judge declared.

"And so the guilty party will take care to keep out of the way until the detective leaves the neighborhood," Tourjay observed.

"So I would imagine, and I think the detective has made a great mistake, for in this case most certainly I should judge that he ought to have taken all possible care to keep anybody from knowing what brought him to this part of the country."

Then the conversation turned to other subjects of no interest to our readers, and after a short time the judge retired to his room.

Tourjay sauntered into the bar-room and as he did so a smooth-faced, middle-aged gentleman, dressed in a neat black suit, who had a decidedly ministerial appearance, made his appearance from the hotel office, where he had just inscribed his name upon the register.

He smiled pleasantly at Tourjay, who for the moment seemed to be a trifle embarrassed, but he advanced and shook hands with the stranger.

"I'm glad to see you, major!" the lawyer exclaimed. "When did you arrive?"

"Just got in," the other responded.

"What brings you up in this region?"

"Oh, no particular business; just traveling around for the purpose of seeing the country, and, incidentally, doing a little business if an opportunity offers."

The name which the new comer had inscribed upon the register was Major Jackson Kaufman, and although he looked like a minister yet he was one of the veteran gamblers of New Orleans.

A man who stood at the very head of the knights of the green cloth.

Tourjay had made his acquaintance during a visit to New Orleans, and the result of several seances which he had held with the major was that the gambler had not only got possession of all the cash which the lawyer possessed but also of sundry bits of paper with the mystic symbols I. O. U. inscribed upon them, followed by figures.

Tourjay came at once to this subject.

"I wrote you in regard to the I. O. U.'s," he said. "I expected to be able to take them up last week, but money has come in so deuced slowly that I have been cramped to get along, but in a day or two I will be all right."

"My dear Mr. Tourjay, do not give yourself the least bit of uneasiness in regard to the matter, I beg," the gambler immediately replied.

"It is not my habit to ever dun a gentleman, and if you had not mentioned the matter I can assure you that I would not have done so."

"When I have a little business transaction of this nature with a gentleman like yourself I am always content to await the convenience of the party, no matter if payment is delayed for a year or two."

"Oh, I will square the thing up as soon as possible!"

"Of course! I am well aware of that fact, and so would never have even dreamed of speaking to you upon the subject!" the gambler declared.

"I will have to admit that I did come up into this region with the idea of hunting you up, but I was not after money."

"The fact is, my dear Mr. Tourjay, the climate of New Orleans is not just as healthful for me at present as it might be," the gambler admitted, lowering his voice to a confidential tone.

"I had a slight discussion with a gentleman in the same line of business as myself—you know the old adage about two of a trade seldom agreeing. He had drank more liquor than was good for him, and wanted to quarrel. I am the last man in the world to get into a personal difficulty if it can be possibly avoided, but when a fight is forced up-

on me I calculate to get in the first blow if I can. I was a leetle quicker on the 'draw' than my opponent, and the result was that the gentleman is now in the hospital, and at last accounts was likely to throw up his share in the world's game for good."

"I do not wonder then that you find it convenient to take a traveling trip."

"Yes, in a case of this kind it is best for a man to get out of the way for a while so as to give time for the thing to blow over," the gambler observed with the air of a philosopher.

"When an affair of this kind happens the newspapers always kick up a deuced row about it, but in a week or so something fresh comes up and the newspaper fellows drop the old and pitch into the new."

"Very true."

"And then, too, I have had an idea for some time that I would like to invest in a plantation up this way. I have managed to feather my nest tolerably well during my professional career and I think that it is about time that I thought of retiring from an active business life."

"That is the reason why I hunted you up," the major explained.

"I knew that you were well posted in regard to this locality, and could, probably, put me in the way of making a profitable investment."

"Oh, yes, I can undoubtedly."

"And, by the way, as I am a stranger to this neighborhood, would it be asking too much for me to request you to keep quiet the fact that I am a professional gambler?" the major asked in a tone of entreaty.

"Certainly not!" Tourjay replied, immediately. "I always make it a rule never to inquire concerning my client's private affairs."

"I know that you are a New Orleans gentleman, you want a plantation and have commissioned me to get one for you."

"And as to my business, I am a planter; that is no lie for I own a little place down the river, below Orleans, which I rent on shares to a fellow."

"And if you happen, incidentally, to get into any little games while you are pursuing your search for a plantation, it is nothing uncommon for a man with plenty of money to indulge in a little amusement of that kind to help pass the time away."

"Is there any chance to get into a game to-night?"

"Yes, I think there is," Tourjay replied.

"Court is in session, and there are a lot of people here from all parts of the country, so I think the prospects are good that I can find enough men with sporting blood in their veins to get up a game."

Tourjay was right in his surmise, for when he set about the matter he found no difficulty in getting four gentlemen upon whose hands time hung so heavily that they were glad to join a card party in order to pass the time away.

Colonel Garrison was one of the four, and the lawyer had been anxious from the beginning to get the colonel into the game.

Tourjay was eager to obtain his revenge, and as he knew the old colonel had plenty of money—was a bold gamester, too, not afraid to risk his cash, he thought there might be a chance for him to get back some of the money which the old man had won from him.

Fortune though did not smile upon the lawyer, for he was just able to hold his own and that was all.

Kaufman, too, magnificent player as he was, could not boast of any gains, for the cards ran persistently and steadily against him.

The old colonel though was a heavy winner, for he was favored with the most extraordinary luck, and he was skillful gamester enough to take advantage of it.

The game broke up at an early hour, for by eleven o'clock three of the party were "broke," and the colonel was anxious to depart for his plantation which was only about four miles away.

The party all indulged in a parting drink before breaking up, and when the colonel told the darky who brought the liquor to hunt up his man and have the mules saddled, the rest betrayed an inclination to guy him.

"You have got a good deal of money

about you, colonel," said one of the gentlemen, in a jesting way. "Ar'n't you afraid that some one will hold you up on the road?"

"If this mysterious fellow who has been committing these bold robberies should happen to get an idea of how much cash you are carrying he would be certain to lay in wait on the road so as to get a chance to clean you out," another one remarked.

"I am armed!" the old gentleman remarked, thrusting his hand behind him and tapping the butt of his revolver. "And I tell you what it is, gentlemen, the man who attempts to stop me on the road would be certain to get a dose of leaden pills which would not be apt to agree with his constitution."

"Colonel, you have drank so much that you wouldn't be able to hit the side of a house at thirty paces!" the third gentleman exclaimed.

"I will give you a hundred dollars if you will let me try the experiment on you!" the colonel responded.

There was a general laugh at this, and then the party broke up.

CHAPTER VI. ON THE ROAD.

TOURJAY volunteered to accompany Colonel Garrison to the stable, cracking a joke by saying that some one ought to see him safely mounted.

At the stable the colonel made an unwelcome discovery.

His man, a big, thick-set negro, who bore the high sounding name of Jupiter Johnson, was stretched out in one corner of the stable, so drunk as to be incapable of moving.

The colonel swore at the negro and booted him lustily, but the fellow was so much under the influence of whisky that all his master's efforts to rouse him were unavailing.

"It isn't of any use for you to waste your time and strength upon him," Tourjay remarked.

"He is in such a condition that if he was roasted over a slow fire it wouldn't rouse him in my opinion," the lawyer added.

"It is a most remarkable thing!" Colonel Garrison declared.

"Jupiter likes his whisky well enough, but this is the first time since I have known him that I ever saw the fellow make a beast of himself, and he has been with me for a good ten years."

"He has evidently struck a new brand of whisky somewhere," Tourjay suggested. "But, I say colonel, you will have a lonely ride going home all alone. Hadn't you better take a bed at the hotel for the night?"

"Oh, no!" the old man exclaimed, decidedly. "I have made the trip a hundred times, and both the mule and myself know the way just as well in the darkest night as in the full glare of the sun."

"Bring out the mule, and I will be off!"

The stableman obeyed the command.

The colonel's mule was estimated to be the finest riding animal in that part of the country.

It was a large white beast with a motion as easy to the rider upon his back as a rocking-horse.

The colonel mounted and set out.

But as he rode by the side of the hotel he was accosted by a middle-aged mulatto man who was apparently very much under the influence of liquor.

The colonel had allowed the mule to proceed at a walk so that when the man came out of the shadow of the hotel park he had no difficulty in stopping the mule by laying his hand upon the bridle-rein.

"Say, is dis yere Massa Kurnel Garrison?" the mulatto inquired.

"Yes, that is my name."

"Massa Kurnel, I hab' somet'ing bery important to say to you," and as he spoke the fellow swayed to and fro, jerking the bridle much to the annoyance of the mule who did not relish any such foolishness.

"Well, what is it?" the colonel exclaimed testily.

"Hurry up, and spit it out! It is getting late, and I have no time to waste upon you!"

"Is Jupiter Johnson, your man, for sure?"

"Yes, he is; what of it?"

"You is quite sure 'bout dat?"

"Yes, I am."

"I wants to be sart'in, yo' know, 'cos I don't want to make any mistake," the man declared with all the gravity of your true drunkard.

"Will you say what you have got to say and get out, you ape!" roared the colonel in a rage.

"Lord sake, kurnel, dat ain't no way for to talk to de man w'at has come for to explain matters to you!" the negro protested with the air of a man who felt that he was being greatly abused.

"Will you speak out and tell me what you want?" the old gentleman cried, impatiently.

"Sart'in, sart'in! dat is jest w'at I am coming to."

"Oh, yes, but you are an infernal long while in getting at it!" the colonel fairly roared.

"You know me I 'spect, kurnel?" and the negro grinned at the planter.

"No, I don't know you!"

"Don't know Pompey Bean?"

"No, I never saw you before in my life and I never want to see you again, you infernal thick-headed numbskull!" exclaimed the colonel losing all patience.

"Let go of my rein, and clear out or I'll knock you down, you miserable black ape!"

"I jest wanted to tell yo' 'bout yer man, Jupe Johnson!" the strange negro cried in a tone of expostulation.

"All right! go ahead and tell! Say what you have got to say, and clear out! Do you suppose that I want to stay here all night?"

"Deed, kurnel, I doesn't want to keep yo' a minite, but w'at I wanted to say was dat if anybody tole yo' dat it was me who got yo' man obfuscated, it ain't so, so!" the negro protested with drunken gravity.

"And is that all you wanted to say?" yelled the old gentleman in a rage.

"Yes, sah, dat is all," responded the other with a low bow.

"Well, you are about the biggest donkey that I have ever seen!" the colonel declared.

"What do you suppose I care about who got the nigger drunk? Get out, you ape, you!"

And then the old gentleman dug his heels into the mule, the action causing the beast to spring forward so suddenly that the strange negro was overturned and sent sprawling on the ground.

The colonel rode off at a good pace, relieving his mind as he proceeded, by cursing the thick-headed negro in the good old southern style.

The night was a dark one, for, although there was a moon, yet it was so obscured by passing clouds, that it afforded but little light.

But, as the colonel had stated, he was so well acquainted with the road that it made no difference with him how dark it was.

In fact, on several occasions when the colonel had drank more liquor than was good for him, so that it was about all he could do to keep his seat in the saddle, the sagacious beast of a mule had carried him straight home without having the benefit of any assistance from his master.

This time, although the old gentleman had drank freely, yet as he could stand a deal of liquor, the whisky had not affected him enough to prevent him from knowing exactly what he was about, so for the first two miles, he rode onward at a brisk pace.

The way led through an open country, the road was good and the colonel proceeded as rapidly as though it was noon-day.

When the old gentleman entered upon the third mile though, he slackened his pace a little, for the road wound through a pine forest and a heavy sandy track, where the animal sunk into the sand up to his pasterns at every step.

After getting into the shelter of the pines the darkness of Egypt reigned, for as the tops of the trees met over the narrow road the straggling rays of the moon were completely shut out.

The colonel let the reins drop upon the neck of the mule, allowing the animal to choose its own gait, and as the old gentleman was beginning to feel a little tired, this and the effects of the liquor which he had drank caused him to nod.

From this drowsiness he was abruptly roused.

A rope fastened across the road, just high enough to clear the head of the mule caught the colonel in the breast and he was in the most unceremonious manner swept from the back of the beast to the ground.

Involuntarily he had clutched at the rope which had given away beneath his weight.

This served to break his fall though and the colonel sprawled upon the ground, lying upon the flat of his back in an extremely laughable manner.

The old gentleman did not feel at all inclined to laugh.

On the contrary he swore in a terrible manner and vowed that he would kill the rascals who had dared to play such a joke upon him.

"Oh, hush her yawp!" cried a hoarse voice and then the light of a bull's-eye lantern was suddenly flashed upon the prostrate man.

The colonel rose to a sitting posture and glanced in amazement at the stranger.

The words of his jovial companions at the hotel in regard to the danger of his being robbed upon the road came immediately into his mind.

At first the supposition that he had been made the victim of a practical joke had come to him, but the moment he heard the hoarse voice and caught a glimpse of the stranger, he at once jumped to the conclusion that he was in the hands of a footpad who designed to rob him.

The man was a big fellow apparently, and for a disguise he had a suit of overalls, worn over his clothes.

His face was covered by a sort of conical hood, black in color, which served both as a mask and a cap.

From under the mask came the hair of a bushy black beard.

The bull's-eye lantern was strapped to the man's waist so as to leave his hands free, and in one of them he held a revolver with which he threatened the astonished colonel.

For a few moments the old gentleman was so taken by surprise that he could only stare at the mysterious unknown.

At last though he recovered the use of his tongue and exclaimed:

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Oh, it is the old game."

"Yes, I am the toll gatherer on this road, you know, and every one who passes is obliged to shell out their wealth," the unknown responded in a brisk, matter-of-fact way.

In other words you are a cursed robber!" exclaimed the colonel in a sudden fit of indignation.

The masked man laughed hoarsely and it was evident that he was amused by the outbreak.

"You always did have the reputation of speaking your mind mighty freely, colonel, and I see that you have not got over your old tricks."

This speech set the old planter to thinking.

The unknown spoke like a man who was acquainted with him, and he endeavored to remember if he had ever encountered a man whose voice resembled the stranger's.

He was not able to "locate" the fellow, although he had a strong impression that he had heard the man's voice before.

Of course the colonel was too good a judge of human nature not to comprehend that it was likely the man was doing all in his power to alter his voice so he could not be identified by its tones.

"I generally say what I think," the old gentleman responded. "But although from your speech it would seem as though you knew me yet I am rather at a loss to place you."

Again the outlaw laughed.

"Well, there isn't any need of your troubling your head about the matter, for I am a kind of modest man, and I had just as lief that folks shouldn't know who is running this leetle toll-gather scheme on this road."

"Ah, a man shouldn't hide his light under a bushel," the colonel declared.

The planter had an object in prolonging the conversation.

His revolver was belted to his waist, and if he could succeed in getting at it there might be a chance for him to offer resistance, and repel the robber.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COLONEL IS DESPOILED.

It will be seen from this that the old gentleman was possessed of a remarkable amount of pluck.

"Kurnel, I reckon we ar' kinder wasting time," the outlaw remarked.

"This is one the jobs which ought to be short and sweet.

"You are mighty well-heeled in the cash line to-night I heered, and so I will trouble you to hand over the valuable as soon as you kin."

"You heard that I was well-heeled?" the colonel exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh, yes, a pard of mine was in the hotel when you fellers came down from your poker game, and from the way the talk went round he allowed that you must have won eight or ten thousand dollars."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Well I ain't a-saying that is a fact, you understand, for all I know about the matter is what the galoot told me.

"I won't kick, you bet your life, if you ain't got more than five or six thousand," and then again the unknown laughed loudly.

"I am not one of the kind of fellers w'ot grumbles at the size of a man's pile. I jest make it a point to take all the cuss has got, and then I am quite satisfied to call it square. There isn't anything of the hog about me I want you to understand."

"So I perceive," the colonel observed, dryly.

"You must have corralled a few thousand anyway at the poker game, unless the fellers w'ot did the talking were a set of the biggest blowers that ever lived, and I will be satisfied with that."

"Do you take all that a man has?" the colonel asked.

"Oh, yes; I allers believe in making a clean sweep," and again the outlaw laughed.

"But, kurnel, we are wasting a heap of time, you know, so shell out and be lively about it."

The old gentleman saw that he was in, the toils and must submit to be robbed unless he was lucky enough to catch the footpad off of his guard so that he could get out his revolver, but as the man was keeping such a careful watch upon him he was rather doubtful about his being able to do so.

The colonel's pistol was a self-cocking one, so that if he could once succeed in bringing it to bear upon the footpad there would be no delay about firing it.

"Of course I don't like this sort of thing," the colonel observed. "But as you have kind of got the best of me at present I suppose I will have to put up with it."

"Oh, yes, I have got the old dead wood on you for sure!" the unknown declared.

"And, kurnel, afore you begin jest let me give you a little bit of a hint.

"Mebbe you have got a revolver, or some other kind of a pistol, hid somewhar in your clothes, and you may take the notion into your head fer to try and git that ar' we'pon out when you ar' s'arching for your wealth, but if you know w'ot is healthy for yourself you won't try any game of that sort."

"You would be apt to be violent, eh?" the colonel questioned in rather a jocose way.

"Wa-al, this hyer is my game now, I reckon, and I would be a mighty big fool to allow any one to take it out of my hand.

"Go ahead! Shell out, and if you don't try to come any gum games on me, you will find that I am one of the nicest men in the world to do business with that you ever struck; but if you are up to any tricks, and I git arter, I am worse than a cage full of wildcats!"

The colonel was a keen observer, a man who possessed remarkably good judgment, and there was something about the stranger as he spoke which impressed with the idea that the fellow was not indulging in any idle boast when he made the assertion.

Still, for all that, the colonel would not have hesitated to engage in a fight if a favorable opportunity offered.

But, as it was, menaced by the leveled revolver in the hands of the footpad, the old gentleman had no other course open to him than to comply with the outlaw's demand.

It went sorely against the colonel's grain to submit, for he had a deal of wealth on his person.

In the first place, there was the five thou-

sand dollars which he had received for Sicard on account of the lawsuit, then there was over a thousand more which he had won in the poker game, and to be obliged to give up over six thousand dollars to this miserable highwayman was extremely hard.

He was in for it though; the rascal had succeeded in getting him at a terrible disadvantage, and as affairs were at present there wasn't anything for him to do but to submit.

Slowly and with great reluctance the colonel produced the money.

"Here is about a thousand which represents what I had when I came to town and what I won in a poker game," he remarked, as he drew out a big wallet.

"Then you didn't win as much at the poker game as the galoots gave out?" the stranger inquired in a tone which plainly revealed that he was not satisfied with the colonel's statement.

"Yes, I won a good deal more money than I have got here, but it wasn't cash, you comprehend; I. O. U.'s make up the balance."

"Oh, yes, I see; but you haven't forked over the five thousand that you won in the lawsuit."

The under jaw of the old gentleman dropped. He had been in hopes that the fact that he had this money on his person was not known to the highwayman.

The masked man was quick to notice the expression of dismay which came over the face of the planter.

"Oho, ho!" the outlaw chuckled, "I reckon that you were kinder thinking that I didn't know 'bout that 'ar five thousand, but bless your innocent old soul, kurnel, that is the main thing that I am arter."

"I ain't no common little two-cent sort of a toll-collector, I want you to understand, but the kind of man who allers goes arter big game, and I wouldn't have taken the pains to arrange this hyer little trap for you if I hadn't been going to get well paid for my trouble, so shell out the leetle five thousand, kurnel."

The planter was in the snare and so had no choice but to obey, although it was with the greatest reluctance that he produced the money.

"Put the plunder down on the ground in front of you, kurnel, if you please," the outlaw remarked with mock politeness.

The old gentleman complied with the request.

"Now git on your pins, walk backward for ten paces, then turn around."

"Don't attempt to try any foolishness," the highwayman added. "I shall have a bead drawn on you all the time, you understand, and if you should be foolish enough to try to pull your gun, I shall be obliged to salivate you for keeps."

"All right! I understand!" the colonel exclaimed as he scrambled to his feet.

"Your mule is standing right out yonder—not fifty feet away—and arter I light out you kin mount the beast and go on home."

"I understand," the colonel replied as he commenced his backward movement.

The outlaw directed the light of the bull's-eye lantern full on the figure of the colonel, and kept the revolver leveled at him until the old planter got to the end of the ten paces.

"Slew 'round, kurnel!" the highwayman cried.

And as the old planter obeyed the command the footpad made a grab for the money, turning off the light of the lantern as soon as he had secured the plunder.

Then he ran into the pines on the side of the road, the soft sand concealing his footsteps so that the colonel was not aware of this movement.

As soon as the old gentleman turned around he commenced to feel for his revolver, being very cautious though how he set about this, for he was aware how important it was that the masked stranger should not suspect what he was after.

"The infernal rascal!" he muttered. "If I once get a chance to draw a bead on the scoundrel if I don't send him to kingdom come in short order then it will be because I am not as good a shot with the revolver as I think I am."

"Why, with that lantern held in front of him it will be like firing at the head-light of a locomotive."

"A man must be a mighty bad shot not to be able to hit such a mark."

And then the old man chuckled to himself as he reflected how he would surprise the outlaw.

But a surprise which he little expected was in store for him.

His revolver was gone!

"Blame the luck!" the old man exclaimed in deep disgust.

"It must have been jolted out of the holster when I was tumbled from the back of the mule."

This was a reasonable explanation.

"Darn my buttons!" muttered the colonel.

"Now if this ain't what I call the worst kind of luck then I don't know what luck is!"

Then the old fellow relieved his mind by swearing fluently to himself for a few moments.

At last he became impatient and called out:

"Say! how long have I got to stay hyer?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEARCH.

As there wasn't any answer to the question the colonel essayed another one:

"Have you got any objection to my turning around?"

No answer again.

"I wonder if the cuss has sloped?" the old gentleman muttered as he then faced about.

Naught but the darkness, which hung like a funeral pall over the earth, greeted his eyes.

"It is just as I reckoned!" the colonel exclaimed. "The rascal has gathered in the wealth and lit out!"

"Over six thousand dollars—blast his eyes! That is a healthy sum for the scoundrel to git away with, but I will rouse the country 'bout the matter, by jink! I will be hanged if I don't spend as much more to capture him."

"Now, then, where is that blamed mule? I will go back to the town at once and give the alarm!"

"I will have a gang after the rascal this very night! I will move heaven and earth to catch him, blame me if I don't!"

The colonel was fearfully annoyed at the outrage which had been committed upon him, and although he was noted for his closeness, being a man who thought a great deal of his money, yet under such circumstances as these he was prepared to spend it like water to secure revenge.

It did not take the old gentleman long to find his mule, as the well-trained animal, seemingly understanding that something was wrong on being so abruptly relieved of its rider, had waited patiently in the middle of the road.

The colonel mounted and rode back to the town, urging the beast to a good pace as soon as the gloom of the pines was passed.

The longer the colonel reflected upon the trick which had been played upon him the greater grew his rage, and by the time he reached the hotel his anger was at a white heat, so to speak.

There was a group of gentlemen seated upon the piazza of the hotel smoking when the colonel rode up.

In the party were Judge Whaley, Alexander Tourjay and the new-comer, Major Kaufman.

By this time the clouds had passed away so that the moon shone out full, and its rays made the night almost as light as by day.

The colonel had been recognized as soon as he came in sight, and the men upon the piazza were prepared to guy him immediately.

"Aha, colonel, you thought better of your idea of taking a lonely homeward ride, eh?" exclaimed the up-river planter, David Kettleman by name, who had been the heaviest loser in the poker game.

"Well, that is where you are sensible. Light down and we'll all go in and have a drink together," the gentleman added.

"I will dismount, gentlemen, but I reckon that when you hear what I have got to say you will all feel like getting into the saddle and taking a ride with me!" the colonel exclaimed.

The announcement at once excited the surprise of all the party and the old gentleman was pressed to explain.

This he speedily did, and great was the amazement which his story excited.

One and all declared that it was the boldest outrage which had ever been perpetrated in the county, and there was not a man present who was not eager to go with the colonel in an endeavor to catch the scoundrel.

As it happened the sheriff of the county was conversing with some friends in the bar-room; Tourjay was aware of this fact, and suggested that the sheriff ought to be notified.

"Yes, I reckon that he would be the proper person to take charge of the thing," the colonel assented.

Tourjay volunteered to explain the matter to the sheriff.

Bill Todhunter, as the official was named, was a big, brawny, good-natured fellow, as bold as a lion, a man who did not really know what fear was, but not at all suited for the career of a man-hunter.

Like the majority of mortals, though, he was not aware of his own deficiencies, and felt the most perfect confidence in his gifts in the bloodhound line.

He was conversing with the private detective Tomlinson, when Tourjay accosted him.

"B'gosh! this beats anything of the kind that I ever heard of in all my time!" the sheriff declared.

Tomlinson looked wise and remarked that this robbery really took the cake.

"The old colonel is right, too, about starting in to track the fellow while the trail is hot," the sheriff asserted.

"If we pile right in after him now the chances are big that we will be able to get on his track and nail him."

"You were arter information, Mister Tomlinson, 'bout the chap who has been cutting up these didoes in this hyer neighborhood, and now he has put in an appearance so that you kin get right arter him," Todhunter said to the private detective.

"Do you think this is the same man who has been concerned in the other robberies?" Tomlinson asked.

"Oh, yes, thar is no doubt 'bout it in my mind," the sheriff answered.

"I reckon though that thar is a regular gang of the fellows, and this hyer chap is probably the head devil, but to my thinking thar is a big chance now that we kin put salt on his tail."

The official was given to this boastful kind of talk.

"I shall be glad of the chance to go along so as to see how you work a case of this kind," the New Orleans detective remarked.

"You kin hop right in!" the sheriff exclaimed. "And the quicker we get started the better!"

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!" Tourjay assented.

News of this sort always spreads rapidly, and although the hour was late yet by the time that the party were mounted, ready to set out, there were a round dozen in the saddle.

They rode out of the town at a brisk pace, and as Colonel Garrison had explained how dark it was in the pines the searchers provided themselves with lanterns, so as to be able to track the marauder.

It was an easy matter for the colonel to point out the exact spot where the robbery had occurred, for the rope which had so abruptly swept him from the saddle was still tied to the trees.

The members of the searching party examined the rope with a great deal of curiosity, and they all expressed their opinion that it was about as clever a device for rendering a man temporarily helpless as they had ever known.

Colonel Garrison's revolver was found, lying in the middle of the road.

The sheriff removed the rope, for, as he observed, it was a mighty dangerous thing to be stretched across a public road.

Then, with the aid of the lanterns, the "posse" proceeded to search for traces of the fugitive.

In the loose sand it was an easy matter to track the footsteps of the marauder.

After getting within the shelter of the trees he had gone toward the town for about fifty feet, and there the footprints ceased.

But it did not take the seekers after knowledge long to discover why they had done so.

There were signs to show that a horse had been tied at this point, and the robber had evidently mounted the horse and rode off while the colonel had been occupied in searching for his mule.

The loose sand had deadened the sound of the animal's hoofs so that the colonel had not been able to detect this movement.

The robber had rode off on horseback.

This was an undisputed fact, for all agreed to it, but as to which way the horse went, whether in the direction of the town or toward the plantations on the river above the village was a question which gave rise to a heated argument.

Three of the party were sure that the tracks led toward the town; the colonel was particularly strong in this belief.

Three more—the sheriff was one of them—were equally as positive that the tracks led up the road.

While there were six more who frankly said they were not able to make up their minds about the matter, for the tracks were so indistinct—the road was a well traveled one—that it did not seem to them that it was possible any one could tell anything certain about the matter.

"It seems to me that the odds are about a hundred to one the galoot didn't go back to the town!" the sheriff declared, in his obstinate, dogmatic way.

"Don't it stand to reason—saying nothing about the tracks in the road, you understand, at all—that if a galoot picked up a big lot of money like six thousand dollars, that he would make a bee line to get out of the neighborhood as soon as he could?"

"Hain't that the idee, Mr. Tomlinson?" he inquired of the New Orleans man.

"It seems to me that the supposition is a reasonable one," Tomlinson replied.

"This hyer gent is a detective from Orleans, and, of course, he is up to all the dodges which a galoot of this kind is apt to try," the sheriff explained.

"Nine men out of ten would certainly make a break to get out of the neighborhood after they had collared the boodle," the detective said with the air of a man who thought that his opinion ought to have great weight.

"Why should he go to the town?" Todhunter asked.

"There isn't a man in the place who could or would do a job of this kind to my thinking."

All admitted that they did not suspect any inhabitant of the village.

"The chances are that he waited in the bushes until the colonel set out for the town and then he went in the opposite direction as fast as possible."

"Let us make an examination of the road, anyway," Tourjay suggested.

This was done, but no discoveries were made, and after an hour or so the party returned to the town, obliged to admit that they could not find a clue to the robber.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGER.

COLONEL GARRISON was thoroughly exasperated by the outrage which had been perpetrated upon him, and when he awoke in the morning—he spent the night at the hotel—his wrath was fully as great as when he retired to rest on the preceding evening.

The people of the town were astounded when they learned the particulars of the affair, and it was the unanimous opinion that no means must be left untried to hunt the rascal down.

The old planter consulted with his friends, and then, as a result of the deliberation, he wrote out an announcement that he would pay five hundred dollars for the arrest of the highwayman, and give fifty per cent of all the money which might be recovered to the man who got the cash.

This was a liberal offer and the result was that about every able-bodied man in the town set out to capture the bold robber.

The sheriff and Colonel Garrison, accompanied by the same gentlemen who had made up the party on the previous evening, started immediately after an early breakfast.

It was their idea that, aided by the daylight, they might be able to find some clues which had escaped them in the darkness.

This hope was not realized.

Not a single discovery was made, and all

the searchers returned to the town fully as ignorant as when they started.

And then, being thus completely baffled, the people went to speculating in regard to the identity of the robber.

Suspicion was naturally directed to the men residing in the neighborhood who bore bad reputations.

Some thought that it might be possible that such and such a man might be the culprit.

There were about a dozen fellows, living within twenty miles of the town, whose characters were bad, and almost everybody felt certain that it was one of these men who had committed the crime.

This was the sheriff's opinion, delivered at a meeting of the prominent men of the town, which was held in the parlor of the hotel.

"It stands to reason, gen'lemen," Todhunter observed, "that the man who played this low-down game on the kurnel ain't no stranger."

"The reason why I come to this hyer opinion is that the critter talked to the kurnel 'bout his being a big winner in the poker game, and then, too, he knew that the kurnel had corralled five thousand dollars in the lawsuit that day, an' it was that leetle five thousand that the onery dog was arter; now if he hadn't been right in the town hyer, and familiar with w'ot was going on, he wouldn't have known anything 'bout these hyer matters."

The rest agreed that the position taken by the sheriff was a sound one.

"I have been making a few inquiries," the New Orleans detective remarked. "And as far as I can find out no stranger has been seen in the neighborhood by any one."

"That is so, I reckon!" the sheriff exclaimed. "I have been in the town for three days now, and I hain't run across a man that I didn't know by sight, although my memory might be a little rusty on the names."

All present nodded assent; none of them had noticed any stranger, and in a thinly-settled region like the one in the neighborhood of the county-seat, where everybody knew everybody else, it was a clear impossibility for a stranger to make his appearance without at once exciting attention.

They were all satisfied that it was one of the black sheep in the neighborhood who had done the job, but the difficulty was to fix upon the particular man, for the citizens differed radically in regard to this matter.

Some thought one man was more likely than the others to be the culprit, and, in fact, all of the fellows with shady reputations were suspected, but there was no such thing as a general opinion, pointing strongly to one particular man.

And in discussing the matter the gentlemen got into such a heated argument that the sheriff had to interfere to preserve the peace.

"I tell you what it is, gen'lemen," Todhunter observed. "We are jest wasting time chinning about this hyer matter. 'Tain't the least bit of use for one gent for to say 'I suspicion that Billy Buck was the man who did the job,' and then for another gent for to turn up his nose at the saying and cry out 'Nary Billy Buck, Mike McKenna is the man!'"

"No, gents, I make bold to tell you, right hyer and now, that thar isn't any use for us to dispute about this hyer thing."

"One man's opinion is good as another's, but it ain't any better."

"We hain't got any bit of proof to go on, and so we must go slow."

This sensible speech put an end to the wrangling.

"Now then, this hyer is the programme which I think we ought to carry out," the sheriff suggested.

"In the first place this hyer notice of the kurnel's ought to be printed and put up all over the county, then every man ought to keep his eyes open for to see whether any feller is throwing out money in a loose way, so as to indicate that he has got more wealth than he knows what to do with, and if such a feller is spotted, why the odds are big that he has got money that he did not get honestly."

This struck the citizens as being a particularly shrewd speech and they complimented the sheriff upon his sagacity.

"Wa-al, gents, I reckon I kin see as fur into a milestone as the next man!" Todhunter responded.

"This sort of business has got to be stopped in this country, you know, if it takes a leg! And I am going in to do my level best to hunt the critter down."

"My little game will be to see every man for twenty miles around who is a leetle off color and put the question to him, 'See hyer, ar' you the man who got away with Kurnel Garrison's cash?' and you kin bet your boots that when I go in for a cross-examination of that kind I am going to get right at the truth, every time!"

Some of the citizens thought that the sheriff would succeed in making the rifle, as one of them expressed it, while others shook their heads and looked incredulous.

After the sheriff's speech the meeting came to an end.

Judge Whaley was one of those present, and in company with Tourjay, after the citizens left the parlor, repaired to the hotel office where they took seats.

"I am rather inclined to think that our friend, the sheriff, has made a mistake about this matter," the judge remarked.

"He is under the impression that the rascal who got away with the colonel's cash will stay in this neighborhood so that he can get at him, but I am not of that opinion at all."

"What do you think?"

"It is my belief that he will give leg-bail as soon as possible!" the judge declared in a very decided manner.

"The fellow has succeeded in getting a small fortune, and from the manner in which he entrapped the colonel I am inclined to think the man is possessed of a remarkable degree of cunning, and if that is the truth he would surely know enough to take himself out of this neighborhood as soon as possible."

"You are right, judge, I think; your argument is certainly a sound one."

"A man who could devise such a scheme as this must certainly have sense enough to understand that he could not possibly spend the money in this neighborhood without attracting immediate attention, whereas if he goes away to some big city he can make ducks and drakes of the cash as speedily as he likes, and no one will think of asking him how he came by the money."

"I do not think there is a doubt but that you have hit upon the truth, and the colonel will be wise to put himself in communication with the chiefs of police of all the big cities within a reasonable distance of this town."

"That is the course which I shall advise him to pursue."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the stage coach which ran to Sulphurville, the link which connected the county town with the outer world.

There was only a single passenger, and he was so different from the usual run of travelers that he attracted the immediate attention of all who saw him alight.

He was rather under the medium size, but extremely stockily built.

A judge of nationalities would have pronounced him to be an Englishman at the first glance.

He had a round, florid face, with light hair, and small side-whiskers of the same flaxen hue.

He wore a tweed plaid suit, and carried the inevitable umbrella, without which your true Briton never travels.

The stranger entered the hotel, and accosting the fat, jolly old landlord, honest Dave Thompson said:

"Ah, landlord, I propose to stay a week or so with you. Can you give me a good room with a bath attached?"

This speech made the bystanders stare and caused the old landlord to grin, for it was the first time that any guest at his tavern had ever asked for a bath.

"Well, no, I reckon I can't, for a fact, stranger," the host replied.

"I would like to accommodate you, of course, but a bathroom is something that we ain't got in this yere town, let alone in the hotel."

"Ah, yes, I see, you have no regular water supply, I presume—no water laid on."

"Nary time!" the landlord replied. "Wells and the crick are the best that we can do in that line."

"Of course, if you haven't got it you can't give it to me, I understand that perfectly, don't you know; I am not quite a blooming idiot!"

"Well, I shall rely upon you to do the best you can for me."

"Oh, yes, I will take care of you all right. I have got a good, comfortable house hyer, good beds and good feed, but no style to speak of, for in this section of the country we don't go much on style."

"Oh, I dare say I will get along splendidly."

Then the stranger took up the pen, and in a bold hand, wrote:

"HERBERT FITZHERBERT,

London, Eng."

CHAPTER X.

A CONFIDENT MAN.

"OHO, you are from across the water, hey?" the genial landlord remarked as he glanced at the signature.

"Yes, sir, I am an Englishman, and have been making a tour of America. By the by, could you tell me where I will find Judge Whaley?"

"Sart'in, the jedge is over there," and then the landlord summoned the gentleman.

"My name is Herbert Fitzherbert, and I have a letter of introduction to you, sir," the Englishman remarked with a polite bow, drawing a letter from his pocket as he spoke and presenting it to the judge.

It was from one of the leading merchants of New Orleans commending the Englishman to the good offices of the judge, and explaining that he visited that section of the country with the idea of investing in a plantation.

"I am very glad to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Mr. Fitzherbert," the judge declared, greeting the Englishman with the genial hospitality so characteristic of the old-time Southern gentleman. "And I shall be pleased to do any thing that I can for you."

Mr. Fitzherbert thanked the judge and explained that as he had taken a great fancy to the northeastern part of Texas, and being without any particular ties to bind him to his native land, he had come to the determination to settle down somewhere in the neighborhood of Texarkana.

"You can purchase a number of good properties at a reasonable figure within twenty miles of Texarkana," the judge observed.

"I don't propose to go in very largely, you know," Mr. Fitzherbert explained. "Merely want a snug, little place, don't you know?"

"There isn't a doubt but what you can be suited," the judge replied.

"The places run from a thousand dollars upward, and for four or five thousand you can get a good estate."

"Five thousand is about the figure that I want to pay," the Englishman explained.

"I am sure that you will not have any difficulty in suiting yourself, if you are willing to pay that figure," the judge asserted.

"And I am prepared to pay the brass right over, too, don't you see. I am not fond of these blooming mortgages, don't you know?" Fitzherbert declared with a shake of the head.

"I believe in the ready cash, and I made arrangements so as to be able to pay the money right down as soon as I found a place to suit me."

"You will be able to make better terms undoubtedly, for the ready cash is a great object to plantation owners sometimes," the judge responded.

"That was my idea, don't you know? And I just popped a thousand dollars in my pocket, so as to make a payment on account—to secure a place, you understand—if I happened to come across one which suited me."

There were half a dozen people, including the landlord, Judge Whaley, and Alexander Tourjay, who were near enough to the Englishman to overhear his words, and they all looked a little surprised when they heard

him speak so carelessly about carrying a thousand dollars around with him.

Judge Whaley felt that he ought to caution the stranger.

"Really, Mr. Fitzherbert, don't you think it is rather imprudent for you to carry so much money upon your person?" the old gentleman asked.

And now it was the Englishman's turn to look surprised.

"Well, I don't know," he observed slowly. "In fact, I never thought about the matter at all, don't you know?"

"Although the majority of our citizens are as honest and law-respecting men as can be found on the face of the globe, yet there are some black sheep among us, and if the fact became generally known that you are in the habit of carrying so large a sum of money as a thousand dollars around with you, some of the rascals might be induced to make an attempt to get it," the judge explained.

"Well, of course, I don't know what sort of blooming rascals you have got in the neighborhood," Fitzherbert remarked. "But I will say that I have traveled all over the world and never yet was robbed, although I have always been in the habit of carrying considerable cash with me and never took any particular pains to keep the fact a secret, either."

"There is one man in this vicinity who has certainly shown himself to be an extremely dangerous rascal," the judge exclaimed.

The rest nodded a decided assent to this statement, and then Judge Whaley related the particulars of the robbery which had so recently occurred.

The Englishman listened with the utmost attention, but it was plain that the recital did not make much of an impression upon him.

"The man is certainly an extremely bold scoundrel," Fitzherbert observed, when the judge finished the story. "But I rather fancy, don't you know, that he would have considerable difficulty in catching me in a trap of that kind, although I do not pretend to be extra clever. In fact, I am not at all afraid of it. I always go armed, you see, and usually make it a rule to keep my eyes wide open."

It was plain that the stranger had an extremely good opinion of himself, and the judge understood immediately that it would be merely a waste of time to argue the question with him.

Of course, if the man chose to risk the carrying around of much money it was his business and no one else's.

So the judge changed the subject by extending to the Englishman a cordial invitation to make his house at Sulphurville his headquarters until he could secure a place of his own.

"I shall be here two more days on account of the court being in session, and then I shall be happy to have you pay me a visit at my home," the judge said, in conclusion.

Fitzherbert responded in suitable terms to the invitation, and then departed with the landlord to look at the rooms.

"He has an extremely good opinion of himself," Tourjay remarked to the judge.

"Oh, yes, it is my experience that a great many of these Englishmen are inclined to be very dogmatic."

"I am inclined to think that it is a lucky thing for him that the chances are that this rascal who got away with the judge's cash has fled from the neighborhood or else the Englishman would stand a good chance of being relieved of his thousand," Tourjay surmised.

"Yes, for this Briton does not seem to care if every one knows that he has got the money, and the robber, if he has spies in this town, as I strongly suspect, would be sure to hear about the matter, and then the odds are great that Mr. Fitzherbert would be robbed, although he has such perfect confidence that he is fully able to take care of himself."

The pair had turned away from the hotel desk as they spoke and now faced the street, and so were able to notice the arrival of two handsomely dressed young ladies, who had just driven up in a buggy.

It was the judge's daughter, Alberta, and her particular friend, Louise Kettleman, daughter of the upper Red River planter.

Alberta was a tall, dark-eyed girl with regular features, not exactly a beauty, yet a stylish, good-looking girl.

Miss Kettleman was like her father, short, stout and brimming over with good-nature.

Both the judge and the young lawyer hastened out to greet the two ladies.

Alberta was one of the belles of the district.

She was the judge's only child, and it was supposed that Judge Whaley was worth two or three hundred thousand dollars, and it was known that Alberta would be his sole heir, it rendered her an extremely desirable prize in the matrimonial market.

Of course, about all the young men in the neighborhood, who amounted to anything, endeavored to find favor in the eyes of the young lady, and Alexander Tourjay was about as persistent a suitor as any one.

So far though the proud young Southern girl had not given any signs that she preferred one gentleman to another.

She was polite and agreeable to all but none of the gentlemen could boast that she favored him above the rest.

As the gentlemen came up to the carriage the young ladies acknowledged their greetings in a suitable manner.

"I drove over, papa, because Louise wanted to see her dressmaker," Alberta explained. "And I thought I would stop and see when you were coming home."

"I expect to finish up the day after tomorrow," the judge answered.

"And then will you come straight home?" the daughter questioned.

"Yes."

And at this moment the New Yorker, Harvey De Berry came up the street.

He was at the carriage before he noticed the girls or they him, then Alberta uttered a little exclamation of surprise.

"Why, Mr. De Berry, this is an unexpected pleasure!" she declared.

"This is a gentleman whose acquaintance I made during my last trip North," Alberta explained to her father.

And then she introduced the gentleman to the judge and the young lawyer.

A general conversation followed.

The judge was a genial old gentleman, very fond of company, and never so happy as when entertaining guests on his plantation, so, as he was favorably impressed with the New Yorker, he extended to him a pressing invitation to make his house his home for a while.

De Berry accepted the invitation in the same frank spirit in which it was given.

Then after a few more words the girls drove off.

The gentlemen went into the hotel bar-room and had a friendly drink at the judge's expense, then De Berry excused himself on a plea that he had promised to meet Mr. Wolfe at his office, and departed.

"That is a fine young fellow!" the judge exclaimed.

"Yes, he seems to be," Tourjay replied.

"As a rule I don't like these Northerners, for they are usually too close and calculating to suit me, but this young fellow appears to be very much of a gentleman indeed!"

Then an up-river planter called the judge away, and Tourjay was left to his own reflections.

"The judge is impressed with this man, but I am not," the young lawyer muttered.

"Nor am I!" uttered a voice at his elbow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPORT ADVISES.

TOURJAY turned in some little surprise.

It was the veteran gambler, Major Kaufman, who had spoken.

"That is a bad habit that you have, Tourjay, of thinking to yourself in public, and you must be careful," the major warned.

"Yes, I do make a blunder of that kind once in a while."

"I think you are right about this New Yorker though. I don't know exactly why I should form a bad impression of the man at first sight, but I certainly have."

"This is hardly the place to hold a discussion, and as I want to talk to you a bit, suppose you come up-stairs to my room in the hotel," the veteran sport suggested.

"All right! I am agreeable."

The two repaired to Kaufman's apartment; the gambler produced a box of cigars, and after they were comfortably seated, with their cigars well lighted, Kaufman began the conversation by saying:

"Of course, I understand perfectly well that this isn't any business of mine, but I am going to speak because I take a great interest in you, for you are a man after my own heart, so I hope that you will not think that I am taking a liberty in speaking in regard to your affairs."

"Oh, no; I know you well enough, major, to be aware that you are not a man who troubles himself about matters which do not concern him without a good and sufficient reason."

"You are right, my dear fellow, and, as I said, the only reason I overstep my rule in your case is on account of the personal interest that I feel in you."

"Of course, until I took up my quarters in this town I knew but little of your affairs," the gambler explained. "But now, thanks to the gossips of the place, I am as well posted in regard to you as though I had lived all my life in this neighborhood."

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that there are plenty of my acquaintances who know more about my affairs than I know myself. That is usually the case in all small towns."

"Understand, the people do not speak at all unkindly of you; in fact, the old saying about talking more in sorrow than in anger fits in exactly."

"Well, I suppose that I have about as many friends as any man in this section; some enemies, of course, for the man in this world who hasn't any enemies does not amount to much."

"That is true."

"What do they say about me?"

"Well, old fellow, they get you tolerably near to rights, as the saying is."

"All unite in saying that you are the best lawyer in this section, but they qualify the remark by the statement that you do not attend to business as strictly as you might and that you have some bad habits."

"You indulge in more liquor than is good for you, are rather quick-tempered, and inclined to be quarrelsome, and then you gamble entirely too much."

"To gamble is not so bad in the estimation of these good people if the man is a successful gamester, but they say that you are not fortunate and generally lose."

Tourjay laughed outright.

"That is the cry of the world always!" he exclaimed.

"To gamble, or to steal even, is no sin provided that you are not unlucky enough to be found out."

"Yes, there is a deal of truth in that. Of course, the gossips say that as you are a young man there is time for you to change—to abandon your bad habits, and they think that a dashing, handsome, talented fellow like yourself ought not to have any trouble in making a good marriage."

"Have they picked out the lady?"

"Yes, Judge Whaley's daughter."

Again the lawyer laughed.

"Well, they might have selected a much worse girl for me," he observed.

"So I thought when I ascertained the particulars in regard to her, and it seemed to me that if you could manage to marry her it would be a regular ten-strike, and no mistake!"

"They claim that the old man is worth two or three hundred thousand dollars, and as the girl is his sole heir the man who marries her will come in for a good thing."

"And what do these gossips think of my chances for success?"

"They consider that they are good, for they say that Judge Whaley has the highest possible opinion of you, and he always becomes annoyed if any one says anything against you in his presence."

"Yes, I have heard that the judge has defended me on several occasions when somebody remarked that I drank and gambled altogether too much."

"So I was told. The judge considers that all young men should sow a certain amount of wild oats, and so he is inclined to look with a lenient eye upon your little peccadillos."

"If the matter depended upon the old

judge I feel certain that I would get the girl all right; but, unfortunately, Miss Alberta appears to have a mind of her own and I do not feel at all sure about winning her consent."

"Women are very uncertain creatures," the old sport remarked, with the air of a philosopher.

"I know what I am talking about, you understand, for I have had five wives."

"You ought to be a judge, then."

"Well, I think I am. Besides, the study of mankind has always been a favorite one with me. A man in my line of business has got to be a good judge of character, you know."

"Of course."

"Well, now, on account of the feeling which I have for you, I take a deep interest in this game; and it seems to me that from the way you are situated it is mighty important for you to get this girl."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that."

"This is the first time that I have ever seen you together, and so I watched the girl just as I would watch the run of the cards out of a faro box when I had a mighty big interest in the game."

"Ah, yes, and a man is apt to keep his eyes open at such a time."

"You bet!"

"Did you arrive at any conclusion about the matter?"

"Oh, yes, and it is my opinion that at present the young lady is not very much struck on you."

"Well, I am rather inclined to the opinion that you are right," the lawyer remarked with a grave look on his face.

"I am not going to make any bones about admitting to you that very soon it is going to be an absolute necessity for me to make a raise in some way."

"There are a few of my creditors who are pushing me very hard for money, and I must get some cash to satisfy their demands."

"In this matter I have been hoping against hope, trying to make myself believe that she looked with a more favorable eye upon me than upon the rest of the men who are trying to win her, but I confess that, really, I have no grounds for thinking that she favors me more than any other man."

"If I was going to gamble on the thing, I should be inclined to bet against you, for I think there is a man in this burg who stands a much better chance to get the girl than you do."

"Do you mean this stranger—this New Yorker?" Tourjay asked with a gloomy brow.

"He is the man."

"It struck me that during the brief conversation which she held with him she looked at the man in a different way from which I ever saw her regard any other fellow."

"That is the point exactly!" the major exclaimed in his emphatic way.

"There was a certain something in her manner when she addressed him, which was lacking when she spoke to you, what the poets call the love-light in the eye, you understand."

"Ah, yes, I don't think there is any mistake about the matter," Tourjay assented, a ugly scowl darkening his face.

"And I tell you what it is, major, it is a mighty rough thing for this infernal Yankee to come down here and capture the wealthiest girl in the county!"

"Oh, well, these little things will happen," the old gambler remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"Women are extremely uncertain and unreliable, and a girl of this kind, who knows she is a prize, is apt to be caught by a stranger."

"If he had not come along I think there would have been some chance for me."

"I should not be surprised if that is the truth, and now the question comes up, can't you do something to block the New Yorker's game?" the major inquired in his shrewd way.

"Well, I suppose that I might pick a quarrel with the man."

"If he is gentleman enough to take an affront, a duel might be arranged, and the chances are great that I would be able to dispose of him," the lawyer replied, thoughtfully.

"That is just the idea which I had, but you may have some trouble in forcing him into a fight. The Northerners don't go much on the dueling business, you know, and it may not be an easy matter to force him into a fight."

"If I manage the affair so it will not be apparent that I am going out of my way to quarrel with him—arrange it so it will seem as if the difficulty came up accidentally, and he then shows the white feather it will be apt to give Miss Whaley a poor opinion of him."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!" the major declared.

"She is a true Southern girl, and the women down in this section of the country don't have much opinion of a man who will not fight when the occasion arises."

"That is certainly correct, and if I can fix the matter so as to make this stranger appear like a coward I think the odds are great that Miss Whaley will be so disgusted with him that she will never want to set eyes on the man again."

"That is the game!" the major responded. "And if you work it right I don't think there is a doubt but what the trick can be done."

"It is well worth the trial, and I will set about the matter as soon as possible, for if I wait until it is manifest that the New Yorker is paying attention to the lady my motives may be suspected."

"You are right about that. It is important that the girl shall not be implicated in the quarrel."

"I will proceed at once," Tourjay remarked, rising. "For the quicker I do it the better."

CHAPTER XII.

PROVOKING A QUARREL.

"I WILL accompany you," the veteran gambler remarked, also getting up.

"If you do succeed in getting the man to meet you upon the field of honor you will need a friend to act as your second, and I will be delighted to serve in that capacity."

"I will be glad to have you."

"I am no novice in this line, you understand, for I have been out as a principal half a dozen times, to saying nothing of acting as second."

"Yes, I felt certain when you spoke that you were an old stager."

"You will, probably, have to give the fellow the choice of weapons," the veteran gambler observed, thoughtfully.

"Very little doubt about that, for I will have to act as the challenger, and the man who is invited to a hostile meeting always has the choice of weapons."

"It really does not make much difference," the major declared. "For the chances are great that he will choose pistols. Men nowadays rarely fight with anything else in this section of the country."

"There are only three weapons which he is likely to choose, pistols, rifles or swords, and, really it does not make much difference to me which one he selects for I am an expert in the use of all," the young lawyer explained.

"Oh, yes, you have got him all right if you can only succeed in getting the man to meet you, but if he refuses to come up to the scratch, and you can make it appear that he is afraid to go out, your object will be accomplished, for a girl like Judge Whaley's daughter will certainly not have any use for a coward."

Tourjay assented to this and the two proceeded down-stairs to the hotel office.

Luck favored the schemer, for the New Yorker was seated in a corner of the room, conversing with the proprietor of the hotel.

The lawyer was a quick-witted fellow and as soon as he saw the two together he hit upon a plan.

"The major and I are just going in to have a social drink," the lawyer said to the landlord. "And I will be glad to have you, and your friend, join us."

"Certainly, I hain't got nary an objection," the host replied.

Then he introduced the New Yorker to the pair and they all marched up to the bar.

Tourjay took care to get next to the stranger.

All called for whisky but De Berry, who asked for ale.

"Here's my compliments, gentlemen," the lawyer observed as he took his glass in his hand.

As he spoke he nodded to the landlord who was on his left hand, then turned toward De Berry on his right, and contrived to bring his elbow against the New Yorker's arm so that the concussion spilled the whisky.

"That was devilish awkward of you, stranger?" Tourjay exclaimed, angrily.

De Berry, having been warned by his friend, Wolfe, the lawyer, about Tourjay, had made up his mind to treat the man as civilly as possible when he encountered him, so as not to give the other an excuse to quarrel with him, but as the New Yorker had the best blood of youth in his veins, when he was addressed in this insolent way he immediately felt a disposition to resent the imputation.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "It was not really through any awkwardness of mine that your liquor was spilled."

"Do you mean to say that it was mine?" Tourjay demanded in an extremely insolent way.

"Yes, most decidedly it was!" the New Yorker replied, firmly, for he was angry at being addressed in such a tone.

"No such thing! It was your infernal carelessness, and I would like to know where you were brought up to act so awkwardly."

"It was your own awkwardness not mine!" De Berry retorted.

"Do you mean to call me a liar?" Tourjay demanded, hotly, affecting to be very angry, when in reality he was perfectly cool.

The landlord had listened to the discussion in utter astonishment.

He knew that the young lawyer was hot-tempered, and disposed to be rather overbearing at times, but he had never seen him get angry for such a trivial cause as this, and he took it upon himself to act as peacemaker.

"I reckon that this hyer was all a pure accident," he remarked. "And, gentlemen, it ain't really worth talking about."

"Jimmy, pass the bottle to Mister Tourjay," this to the barkeeper.

"Fill 'em up ag'in, Alec, and don't say nothin' more 'bout it!"

"Oh, yes, that is all very well, old fellow, but this man has insulted me in the grossest manner, and I don't propose to allow any man to term me a liar without being called to an account!" Tourjay declared.

"But it seems to me that this hyer hull thing is a mistake!" the landlord replied. "And thar ain't no need of gitting wrathy 'bout the thing. Let's all take a drink, and say no more 'bout the thing."

"No, sir, no man shall call me a liar with impunity!" Tourjay declared. "And this fellow has got to take it back—right quick too!"

The insolent manner of the Southerner galled the New Yorker to the quick, and though he had made up his mind to do his best not to be drawn into a quarrel with any one, particularly with this man, yet under such circumstances as these he could not see any course open to him by means of which he could avoid the difficulty.

Never yet in his life had he shrunk from an opponent, and he was not disposed to do so now.

"You are a hot-headed idiot!" the New Yorker cried, nettled by the contemptuous way in which the other had applied the word "fellow" to him.

"And if you had any sense you would be aware that it was your own blundering carelessness, and not mine, which caused the spilling of the liquor!"

"You impudent rascal! do you dare to insult me?" the young lawyer cried, apparently wild with rage.

And then with a sudden motion he dashed the remainder of the whisky in his glass in the face of the New Yorker.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed De Berry enraged by this insult, and as he spoke he gave the lawyer a "right-hander," which, landing between Tourjay's eyes, laid him out on the flat of his back in an instant.

Tourjay had expected to receive a blow when he had dashed the liquor in the face of the other, but he had not calculated upon

getting any such a stroke as he received, nor so quickly.

For a moment he saw more stars than he had ever beheld in the heavens.

A worse man in the fisticuff line than the young New Yorker, who had been the champion middle-weight boxer of his college, he could not have encountered.

Tourjay rather prided himself upon his muscular powers, and he had expected to "smack" the stranger two or three times before they were separated by the bystanders, but this one blow satisfied him that he would be very foolish to try to compete with the other in the boxing line.

He rose slowly to his feet, his face white with rage.

There wasn't any make-believe about his anger now.

Never in all his life had he received such a blow.

The New Yorker was on the alert. He expected that he would be attacked, but was not sure whether his antagonist would use the weapons which nature had given him, his fists, or resort to a pistol or knife.

The landlord too anticipated that there would be a bloody and desperate fight between the two men, and as he feared that damage would be done to the ornaments of his bar-room—it was fitted up in extra good style for a country town—he hastened to interfere.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen! this hyer thing has got to stop right hyer!" he declared, getting in between the two.

As the landlord was a tall, fat man, when he interposed his massive body between them it was not an easy matter for the pair to get at each other.

"I have been struck by this ruffian and that insult must be wiped out in blood!" Tourjay exclaimed.

"You have no one to blame but yourself, and it ought to be a lesson to you to keep a civil tongue in your head for the future," De Berry retorted.

"I will put you where you will not have any need of a tongue, civil or otherwise, if you are not a white-livered coward!" the young lawyer cried, in a terrible rage.

He was standing so that he could catch sight of himself in the glass, and his mortification and rage was great when he saw that the blow had given him as fine a pair of black eyes as any man ever possessed.

Being of a quarrelsome nature he had been concerned in a half a-dozen personal encounters, but this was the first time that he had ever been materially damaged, and that fact made him outrageously angry.

He had sense enough though to be afraid that in a boxing bout he would not stand any chance with the New Yorker, and so he was glad that the landlord had interposed so there was chance for a fight.

"I make no particular pretensions to bravery," De Berry replied. "But I think I am able to take care of myself, no matter where I may be, or how I am situated."

"You have put a mortal affront upon me, sir, and among gentlemen there is only one way to settle a matter of this kind," Tourjay declared.

"I suppose that you understand what I mean—if you are a gentleman you certainly do?" the lawyer continued, with an ugly sneer.

"You mean a duel," the New Yorker observed.

"Yes, you have grossly insulted me with a blow, and only the shedding of blood can avenge such a wrong as that. You must meet me upon the field of honor, and settle this matter according to the code."

"That is certainly correct," the major remarked. "Among gentlemen there is no other way."

"Well, I am from the North where we do not believe much in that method of settling personal difficulties," De Berry replied, slowly.

"If you were man enough to dishonor me with a blow you ought to be man enough to be willing to give me the satisfaction which I am entitled to demand," Tourjay declared, angrily.

"This whole affair can be sifted right down into a nutshell, and I will do it if you will permit me to speak, gentlemen," the major observed.

"I have no objection," the New Yorker responded.

"Nor I," Tourjay assented.

"As far as I can see there are but two ways to settle this matter," the veteran gambler remarked, with the air of an oracle.

"A blow has been given and received; now then the men concerned must either meet upon the dueling-field, and settle the matter according to the code as recognized among gentlemen, or they must lay in wait for each other on street corners and indulge in an impromptu fight where the quickest man on the 'draw' has the best of the argument."

"In the Northern States we do not arrange matters after this fashion, and if one man killed another upon the field of honor, as you term it, or ambushed him to his death, the law would be certain to hang the man for murder," De Berry explained.

"Ah, yes, but you are not now at the North you must remember!" Tourjay exclaimed.

"You have come to this section and must abide by its rules, and if you refuse to give me satisfaction, I will post you as a coward and you can rest assured that no Southern gentleman or lady will care to associate with a man who does not meet his adversary in a fair fight."

"Is not this the truth, gentlemen?" the lawyer asked, appealing to the crowd.

Quite a number of people had assembled, attracted by the sound of the altercation, and one and all nodded their heads.

"He has got it 'bout right, Mr. De Berry," the landlord remarked. "Down hyer a man is expected to fight when he is challenged, and if he don't, why, the folks are apt to think that he ain't got as much sand as he ought to have."

Again the bystanders nodded, and the New Yorker was intelligent enough to see that if he refused to meet the fire-eating lawyer, nine out of every ten would believe that he was afraid.

Now, in truth, the New Yorker was as brave as a lion, but being educated to believe that the *duello* was a relic of the dark ages, he had shrunk from having a part in it.

But now, when the steel was put to him in this way, he cast his repugnance to the "code of honor" to the winds.

"I have no hesitation in saying that I do not believe in the custom of dueling, and of my own free will I would not take part in an encounter of that kind, but when anybody says that it is because I do not possess sufficient courage to stand up and face my man, then I am obliged to state that it is not the truth."

"You can best prove that by sending me a challenge!" Tourjay sneered.

The New Yorker was not simple enough to fall into this trap, and he smiled in an extremely sarcastic manner at the lawyer, as he replied:

"Oh, no, I am not at all anxious for your blood. If you lived until I sought your death you would exist to a ripe old age."

"You were foolish enough to go out of your way to attack me and I punished you for your impudence."

"Now, if you are not satisfied, you can take any steps which may seem proper to you."

"Will you accept a challenge, then, if I send one?" Tourjay asked, angrily, being annoyed that the stranger had escaped the trap which he had set for him.

"Try me and then you will find out," De Berry answered in a non-committal manner.

"Well, sir, I will and speedily too!" Tourjay retorted in a particularly bad humor, for he felt that he was getting the worst of this discussion.

"Major, may I trouble you to act as my friend in this affair?" the lawyer asked.

"Certainly!" the gambler replied.

"In due time this gentleman will wait upon you," Tourjay announced, and then he and the major departed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW YORKER ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGE.

DE BERRY had bowed stiffly in reply to the parting salutation of the two and then sauntered back into the hotel office.

The landlord followed him and the loungers dispersed, each one being anxious to tell the story of the hostile encounter between the strange New Yorker and Lawyer Tourjay.

De Berry's reflections were not agreeable ones.

After having been warned by Wolfe he had made up his mind not to become involved in a quarrel with Tourjay, but as things had come about it was an utter impossibility for him to avoid the difficulty.

And now the question came up in his mind, why did the lawyer force the quarrel on him for there was no doubt in his mind that Tourjay had gone deliberately out of his way to quarrel with him.

"Can it be possible that he is acute enough to suspect that I have come down here for the express purpose of winning Alberta Whaley?" he murmured as he resumed his seat by the window.

"It seems very improbable indeed, but if some important reason of that kind did not urge him on then his conduct is most unreasonable."

The meditations of the young man were interrupted by the landlord's taking a seat by his side.

"Say, stranger, I am powerful sorry that this hyer thing took place," the old gentleman observed with a grave shake of the head.

"I tell you what it is, I would have given a trifle if the thing had happened somewhar else than in my house."

"Oh, well, these incidents will happen once in a while; they are unpleasant, but they are bound to occur."

"I don't see what got inter the critter! I never see'd him act so since I have known him, and I have seen him grow up from a kid, too."

"The accident was entirely his fault."

"Sart'in! that is as sure as you're born!" the host replied.

"I reckon that the critter must have been drinking, although he didn't look as if he had got too much on board."

"He ain't the kind of man who can get a load on board without showing it."

"He certainly did not appear to be under the influence of liquor."

"But it must have been something of that kind, or else he would never have taken it into his head to jump on you as he did," the old landlord declared.

"It is a bad business all 'round," and again the old man shook his head.

"He will challenge you, for sure, and he has a mighty big reputation as a fighting man."

"Oh, I am not at all afraid of him, as far as that goes," the New Yorker replied with a quiet smile.

"You have got one advantage: he has got to challenge you, and so you will have the choice of weapons."

"Yes, that is an advantage of course."

"Say, you are a stranger down hyer and a guest at my house, so it seems to me that I ought to do all I kin for you, and I reckon that I won't be doing a heap of wrong if I give you a leetle tip 'bout Tourjay."

"No, I think not."

"Don't you choose pistols," said the landlord, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"He is a tough cuss with about all kinds of weapons, but pistols is his big holt!"

"Thanks! I am much obliged to you for the warning."

"He is a fair man with the sword, but pistols is his strong point. He has had a dozen or so of fights with pistols and allers come out first best, while with the sword neither he nor t'other cuss got harmed."

"You have done me a great service by giving me this tip," the New Yorker declared. "As it happens, I am an extra good swordsman and only fair with the pistol, so in a case of this kind I must be careful to select the weapon with which I am most familiar."

The entrance of Wolfe, the lawyer, at this point, interrupted the conversation.

"I have just heard about your trouble and came at once to see if I could be of any assistance!" Wolfe began.

"He is going to have trouble and no mistake!" the landlord exclaimed. "But if you keep up a stout heart I reckon the thing will

come out all right." And then the old gentleman departed.

"How did it happen?" Wolfe asked as he took the chair vacated by the landlord.

De Berry related the particulars.

"He made a regular dead set at you!"

"Oh, yes! There isn't any mistake about that!"

Wolfe reflected upon the matter for a moment.

"It does not seem possible, yet I have an idea that he believes you have come after the judge's daughter!" he declared.

"I was on the other side the street when you spoke to her and I noticed that Tourjay had his eyes on you."

"We only exchanged a few common-place words, and the man must be keen-witted indeed to suspect from our bearing to each other that there was a love affair between us," the New Yorker observed.

"The man is wonderfully keen and shrewd," Wolfe declared. "He is eager to get the girl, and if he got the idea that you stood in his way he would not be apt to be scrupulous as to what means he used to remove you."

"But let us go up-stairs and be ready to receive the hostile messenger."

The pair left the office and proceeded to the room of De Berry.

"I do not fancy that we will have long to wait," the New Yorker observed, after he and Wolfe had taken seats.

"I think so from the prompt manner in which he proceeded to pick a quarrel with me, for you will notice that he improved the first opportunity that presented itself—in fact, he did not wait for an opportunity, to state the case correctly, but made one himself."

"That is true."

The New Yorker had not made a mistake in regard to this matter, for in about half an hour Major Kaufman sent up a message to the effect that he would like to have the pleasure of a few words with Mr. De Berry.

The New Yorker replied that he would be pleased to see the gentleman.

When the major made his appearance he proceeded at once to business.

He came as the friend of Mr. Tourjay who considered that he had been grossly wronged by Mr. De Berry, and therefore demanded satisfaction.

"I am quite ready to oblige the gentleman," the New Yorker replied. "Although I do not believe in dueling. But there is an old adage which says, 'When you are in Rome do as the Romans do,' and so as I am in the South, where the people think that every gentleman ought to live up to the code of honor, I will pocket my scruples and accept this challenge to mortal combat."

"Mr. Wolfe will act as my second."

"I shall be pleased to confer with Mr. Wolfe," the veteran gambler replied.

"It will not take long to settle the matter," the young lawyer observed.

"As the challenged party we have the right to select the time, place and weapons."

"That is correct," the major assented.

"Well, it is my idea that a thing of this kind ought to be settled as quickly as possible."

"That is my opinion also," the gambler declared.

"How will to-morrow morning suit you at about five o'clock say?"

"That will do nicely. I believe in having these little affairs come off early in the morning, so there will not be any chance for idle spectators to gather."

"Yes, that was my idea, and now for the place. Little Prairie Ronde, on the road to Sulphurville, is just the spot to my thinking. It is a couple of miles from the town, there isn't a house in the neighborhood, and so there is not much chance of our being exposed to the observation of a gaping crowd of loungers."

"That is good; and the weapons?" the veteran gambler asked.

"Swords."

Major Kaufman shook his head.

"Of course, as you are entitled to the choice of weapons I really hav'n't any right to say anything about the matter," the gambler remarked. "But I would greatly have preferred pistols, for I consider that in an affair of this kind pistols are really the proper weapons."

"It will have to be swords, major," Wolfe replied, in such a decided way that the other immediately comprehended that it would be a waste of time for him to attempt to change the lawyer's decision.

"All right, swords then," he observed. "Will you provide a doctor?"

"Yes, I will attend to the matter."

"I will be much obliged," the major observed, rising and making a ceremonious bow.

"Little Prairie Ronde then, at five to-morrow morning?"

Then there was an exchange of bows and the veteran gambler departed.

"Well, I am fairly in for it," De Berry remarked, after the door closed behind the hostile messenger.

"Yes, and I sincerely hope that you will come out first best."

"I think I stand a fair chance. Fencing has been all the rage with the men of my set in New York for a couple of years now, and I am a member of one of the best clubs in the metropolis."

"You ought to know considerable about that sort of thing then."

"Yes, I think I do, for I took a great deal of interest in the sport, and was considered to be one of the best fencers of the club, so if this man is not an extra good fencer the chances are good that I will be able to give him a lesson which he will be certain to remember for an extremely long time."

"He deserves to be punished, for he went deliberately out of his way to pick a quarrel with you."

"Yes, there isn't any mistake about that. He evidently meant to either drive me from the town or to kill me, but it is my opinion that he will not succeed in doing either the one or the other."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUEL.

THE gray streaks of light which heralded the coming of the day, were beginning to line the eastern skies when the New Yorker and his Southern friend arose from their beds.

After a hasty toilet, the two ate a couple of biscuits and drank a cup of cold coffee.

This was Wolfe's idea.

"It is my notion," he said, "that when a man undertakes a job of this kind he will be able to do much better work if he takes a little nourishment."

"Yes, I should think that would be better than going out on an empty stomach," De Berry replied.

Just as they came to the end of the refreshments, the doctor made his appearance.

He was a good type of the old Southern gentleman, tall, broad-shouldered and portly, with a massive face, ornamented with long, iron-gray hair, and a flowing beard of the same hue.

Jacob Sutherland, he was called, and he was one of the leading men of the country.

After shaking hands with Wolfe and being introduced by him to the New Yorker, the old doctor took a chair and looked with an approving eye upon the remains of the lunch.

"Been taking a bite of something, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, just a little snack," Wolfe replied. "It was my idea that a bite of biscuit and a few mouthfuls of coffee would be apt to send a man to the field in a better condition to do business than if he went on an empty stomach."

"No doubt at all about that," the doctor assented.

"Coffee is one of the best things in the world to steady a man's nerves, and I am glad to see that you know how to send your principal to the field in the best possible condition."

"Men are altogether too careless about preparing for an encounter of this kind," the old gentleman continued with a grave shake of the head.

"This going out and facing a man who is bent upon doing his best to send you to the other world is an extremely serious matter, and yet some fellows rush into it as though it was just the same as going to a picnic."

"I have not had any experience in that line, but I do not doubt that what you say is the truth," De Berry observed.

"Oh, yes, it is," Wolfe affirmed. "There is no doubt at all about the matter, but as the doctor says some men are extremely careless about preparing for an encounter of this kind."

"Your adversary is one of that sort," the doctor declared with a bow to the New Yorker.

"Now, I have no doubt that you took care to get to bed early last night, and to refrain from the undue use of stimulants before retiring."

"Yes, that is correct," De Berry replied.

"And as far as the stimulants go we each had a single glass of ale before seeking the arms of Morpheus," Wolfe added.

"You were wise, and the result of the caution will be that your man will make his appearance on the field in good condition, fresh as a daisy, and with steady nerves."

"I certainly feel as well as I ever did in my life," the New Yorker declared.

"You have acted wisely, which is more than I can say for your adversary," the doctor observed.

The friends looked surprised and gazed inquiringly at the old gentleman.

"I made one of a small gathering last night which met at Sheriff Todhunter's office for the purpose of having a little game," the doctor explained.

"Just a little social party, you understand, and we played cards to pass the time away."

"Well, about twelve o'clock Tourjay came in with another gentleman, and at the first glance it was apparent that he had been drinking freely—in fact, he had considerable more liquor on board than was good for him."

"It seems to me that this was an extremely unwise proceeding on his part," Wolfe remarked.

"Not a doubt about that, my dear sir!" the doctor declared.

"And knowing as I did that at an early hour in the morning he was to be one of the principals in a hostile encounter, I was very much astonished indeed at his lack of caution."

"Then he joined the party at the table, and played until we broke up, which was a little after one o'clock, in the most reckless manner."

"That is an old trick of his," Wolfe observed. "He always plays recklessly, and as though he had a national bank at his back."

"Of course we had a few drinks during the game," the doctor explained. "And Tourjay did not fail to take his share of the whisky."

"Yes, he has been drinking very freely for the last year or two, and it is really a wonder to me how he manages to attend to his business as well as he does, considering that it is reported that he seldom goes to bed sober," Wolfe explained.

"He had entirely too much on board last night, and was inclined to be particularly indiscreet," the doctor affirmed.

"The subject of the quarrel between this gentleman," and he nodded to the New Yorker, "and himself came up, and Tourjay did not hesitate to say that it was his purpose to kill you without mercy."

The brows of De Berry knitted and a stern look appeared on his face.

"I tell you of this circumstance, for I think you ought to know it," the doctor added. "And as the declaration was publicly made before half a dozen people, I do not violate any confidence by so doing."

"I am very much obliged to you indeed, doctor," the New Yorker declared. "And I am glad to learn just how the man feels about the matter." If he is determined to kill me I must do my best to prevent him from accomplishing his purpose."

"He seems to be extremely bitter toward you and it was a matter of surprise to all of us that a trivial quarrel should make him feel so terribly incensed against you," the doctor remarked.

"It is certainly a most mysterious affair," Wolfe asserted.

"There really wasn't any reason for the trouble, and Tourjay decidedly went out of his way to provoke an encounter."

"So I understand," Sutherland replied. "He is very sore over the fact that he is badly disfigured by the blow which he received, and he declares in the fiercest manner possible that nothing but the heart's

blood of the man who put such a humiliation upon him will suffice to wipe out the stain."

"It was his own fault, and he certainly has no one to blame but himself," the New Yorker responded.

"He forced the quarrel on me, and if he got more than he bargained for it is due to his own imprudence."

Then the doctor consulted his watch.

"Hello! it is time we were off!"

It had been arranged that the three should proceed to the dueling ground in the doctor's carryall.

The conditions of the contest required each man to furnish his own sword.

Wolfe had procured an excellent one for the New Yorker.

Great pains had been taken to keep the matter quiet, but the fact that a quarrel had taken place was, of course, known to all, and the gossips were too well-posted in regard to affairs of this kind not to be aware that a hostile meeting would surely result.

The loungers about town kept their eyes open, and although no one but Tourjay was indiscreet enough to do any talking about the matter, yet it was generally suspected that a hostile meeting had been arranged.

The men who were eager to see the show calculated that the fight would take place early in the morning, and so they were on the alert.

When the doctor drove up to the hotel in his carryall, they were sure that the contest was "on."

The word was quickly passed around, and the result of this was that when the carryall started, a little cavalcade of horsemen followed in the rear.

The doctor laughed as he looked back and noted the rear guard.

"It does not seem to be of any use to try to keep an affair of this sort quiet," he remarked.

"The particulars are bound to get out, and I never knew of an encounter of this sort taking place without there being plenty of witnesses."

When the carryall arrived on the ground, and the three got out, they found that Tourjay and the major had already arrived.

The principals exchanged ceremonious bows and then walked apart, while the seconds, with the doctor, proceeded to arrange the details of the encounter.

A coin was flipped for the choice of position, and Wolfe won.

"Well, you have secured the first advantage," the gambler remarked, and, strange to say, he was annoyed by the circumstance.

"It does not amount to anything," Wolfe rejoined. "For as far as I can see there isn't any difference."

This was the truth, but to the mind of the veteran sport it was a bad omen that he had lost what might be considered as the first trick in the game.

Then the swords were examined with critical eyes.

The sword which had been provided for Tourjay was a superb weapon, and the pair were as much alike as two peas.

"My principal considers that he has received so gross an insult that the death of the man who gave it alone can wipe it out," the major announced. "Therefore it is his wish that this fight shall continue until one or the other is stretched helpless upon the field."

"That is satisfactory to us," Wolfe replied. "My man has no particular longing for the blood of his antagonist, but, notwithstanding that fact, he is willing to give him all the satisfaction he desires."

The prompt manner in which Wolfe agreed to the terms of the fight rather puzzled the gambler, and he confided the fears which had taken possession of him to Tourjay.

"I say, my dear fellow, I am afraid that this man is not only possessed of courage enough to stand the steel, but also understands something of the game."

Then he described how he had tried a little "bluff," as he expressed it.

"It may be possible that he is a good swordsman," Tourjay replied, thoughtfully.

"Well, you are a good fencer, also?"

"I am not anything extra, and then, too, I am a little out of practice. I wish that it had been pistols, for then the odds are great."

that I would have succeeded in putting the fellow out of my path."

"It could not be fixed in that way, so you will have to do the best you can."

It had been arranged that the doctor should give the signal for the duel to begin by firing a shot from his revolver, so, after the principals were in their place, and the seconds retreated to a safe distance, the old gentleman warned the duelists that he was about to give the signal, and then discharged his pistol in the air.

Clash! rung the swords, and the duel opened.

Eagerly the lookers-on watched the pair.

Nothing was heard but the whizzing, striking sound of the swords and the deep breathing of the combatants.

Suddenly Tourjay reeled backward, tossed his hands aloft, and fell.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MESSAGE.

It was apparent at once to the lookers-on who had had experience in this sort of thing that from the way Tourjay fell he had been hard hit.

The major hurried to his principal, followed in hot haste by the rest, with the exception of the New Yorker, and Wolfe, who advanced to De Berry's side.

"You have hit him!" the lawyer cried.

"Yes, I did not think there was any doubt about my being able to lay him out."

"He went down as if he was badly hurt."

"I tried to strike him in the right arm, my object being to give him a lesson which would be apt to last him for some time."

"It was not my intention to kill the man, for I do not wish to have any one's death at my door, it being my idea to disable him."

"I have a strong desire to live just now, and I did not intend to give the man a chance to shorten my life if I could possibly help it."

"I judge that you have succeeded in your design, but I will soon ascertain."

Then Wolfe hurried to where the people were grouped around the fallen man.

Tourjay had fainted, and a large blood-spot upon his shirt-bosom showed where wound was located.

The duelist did not wear a vest, following the custom so common in some parts of the South, and so when the doctor opened his coat he was able by means of the blood-stain to locate the wound immediately.

The sword had struck the right arm of the lawyer and then glancing on the bone had entered his chest.

"I am afraid that he has received a very ugly wound," the doctor declared after an examination.

"The quicker we get him to the hotel the better."

There were plenty of assistants, and it did not take long for the men to remove Tourjay to the doctor's carryall and then he was driven back to the town.

The doctor announced that as soon as he deposited the wounded man at the hotel he would send the carriage back for the two friends, but they immediately replied that while they were obliged to the old gentleman for his courtesy they did not deem that it was necessary, for as the town was only a couple of miles distant they could walk.

So away went the carryall with the wounded man, the doctor and the major, while the horsemen rode off at a brisk pace in the advance, each man eager to reach the town that he might tell the tale of the fight.

"Well, you have succeeded in getting the best of your man, and without much trouble too," Wolfe remarked to the New Yorker as they walked leisurely toward the town.

"Yes, I did not have much doubt from the beginning that I would be able to hit him all right. All that I had to fear was that he might be equally as good a swordsman as myself, and would be able to hit me as soon as I did him."

"I fancy that he is badly wounded, and it may be some time before he recovers, but when he does, if his wound is not mortal, then you must look out for yourself, for he is a vindictive fellow, and since he has failed to get the best of you in a fair and open fight, the chances are great that he may resort to underhand means."

"I shall be on my guard, for I am satisfied from the way in which he has proceeded that he has some powerful motive for wishing to get me out of the town."

"It certainly has that appearance, but there does not appear to be any reason why he should desire your absence, excepting that he has taken it into his head that you may succeed in winning Miss Whaley."

"He is a long-headed fellow," Wolfe continued in a reflective way. "And it is possible that he suspects that it is the girl who attracts you here."

"The man must be extremely shrewd to suspect such a thing, but I rather incline to the belief that it is the truth," the New Yorker observed.

"I should not be surprised, and you must be constantly on your guard, if he does not die of his wound."

"I shall not fail to take all possible precautions!" De Berry declared.

Leaving the pair to pursue their way, we will proceed to the hotel, where Tourjay had been conveyed, and placed on the bed in his apartment.

By the time that his clothes had been stripped off, he had recovered the use of his senses.

"The fellow managed to play me," he murmured to the doctor who was trying to ascertain the condition of the wound.

"Yes, that is true, but just keep quiet for a while until I find out how badly you are damaged," the old gentleman replied.

"I have an ugly scratch on my arm, and a painful wound in my side, but I don't feel at all now as if I was going to make a die of it, although the wound did cause a collapse on the field of action."

"We will soon find out just how bad it is," the doctor remarked.

The sword had struck a rib and veered around to the side, only producing a slight flesh wound.

"It does not amount to anything," Doctor Sutherland said in conclusion after he had explained to Tourjay all the particulars.

"In a week we will have you on your legs again all right, but it will be necessary for you to keep quiet for a few days so as to give time for the wound to heal."

Then the doctor departed, leaving the major and the wounded man together.

"I am playing in hard luck, major!" Tourjay observed with a grimace.

"Yes, but, my dear fellow, you can console yourself with the reflection that it might have been much worse."

"That is true; the man might have pinked me for keeps."

"And that would be much worse than just lying up for a week."

"Yes, no doubt about that. Do you know, major, that I had a presentiment that I was going to get the worst of the deal when we lost the toss for position?"

"It occurred to me at the time that it was a bad omen."

"The scheme to drive the man out of the town has proved to be a complete failure," Tourjay remarked in a gloomy way.

"In fact, it is the old story of the engineer hoist by his own petard."

"I set out to damage the Northerner, and have only succeeded in making a hero out of him, for, of course, his victory over me will be apt to make people think that he is a deuce of a fellow."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that!" the major assented.

"I am not the kind of man, you know, to give up in despair because I have made one failure," and there was a grim look on the handsome face of the lawyer as he spoke.

"Certainly not! You have got more backbone about you than to try a game of that kind. The old saying fits in here: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'"

"That is the idea exactly!" Tourjay declared.

"But it will be a week or so before you will be able to make any move," the veteran gambler said in a reflective way.

"Sometimes a week or two makes a heap of difference in this uncertain world," the major added with the air of a philosopher.

"Yes, that is correct, and while I am compelled to remain helpless here a marriage may take place."

"That is what I had in my mind."

"I have not neglected to take that into my calculations," Tourjay remarked. "And I can assure you that I do not intend that this fellow shall enjoy a clear field for a week or two even if I am laid up."

"Work can be done by proxy, of course," the major observed.

"That is just my idea! He has won the first trick, and now I will set to work to see if I can't take the second."

"You can depend upon me, you know, if you need any assistance."

"I am aware of that, and I have quite an important part for you to play."

"All right! I will be glad to oblige you."

"You must get a horse and ride over to Sulphurville, there take the river road, go to the west, and about three miles from the town the road leaves the side of the river on account of a swamp and bends inland."

"I have heard them speak of that swamp, I think, Blue Gum Swamp it is called, I believe?" the major queried.

"Yes, that is the one. Just on the edge of the swamp, and near the river, is a solitary log-house, the cabin of a man whose reputation is not as good as it might be. He is called Black Jake, and the people in his immediate neighborhood have an idea that he will steal anything that he can get his hands on, although he pretends to be a hunter and fisherman, getting his living by his gun, line and nets."

"They regard that as a blind."

"Correct! He peddles his game and fish in the village, and, really as he is both an expert hunter and fisherman, he ought to be able to make a living in an honest way easy enough, but he is a regular old soak as far as whisky is concerned, and it does not take him long to get rid of his money."

"Ah, yes, we all have our little pet weaknesses."

"When you see Black Jake tell him that you came from me, and show him this ring." As he spoke Tourjay slipped a peculiar seal ring from his little finger and gave it to the major.

It was a cameo and represented a serpent coiled, ready to strike.

"When he sees that you are in possession of the ring, he will understand that you come from me, and possess my confidence."

"Yes, I comprehend," the major observed as he placed the ring on his little finger.

"You will relate to the man the particulars of my fight with the Northerner, and say to him that I feel so badly about my defeat that I stated to you that I would be willing to give a couple of hundred dollars to get square with this De Berry."

"Will he be apt to put any questions to me in regard to the matter?"

"No, excepting that he may inquire where the man is to be found, and, possibly, what sort of fellow he is."

"Ah, yes, he may require a little information," the major remarked with a knowing smile.

"Yes, and that is all. Jake is a very sensible fellow, and when you tell him how I feel about the matter, he will know what is required of him without further explanation."

"All right, I will attend to the matter for you, and as I believe in prompt action I will set out immediately."

The major was as good as his word, for in ten minutes he was in the saddle and on the road.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLUE GUM SQUATTER.

The major rode on at a good pace.

The veteran gambler had taken a great fancy to the wild young lawyer, and therefore was anxious to do all in his power to oblige him.

That the New Yorker had succeeded in getting the best of the duel was a most disagreeable surprise to the major, for he had confidently expected that Tourjay would not have any difficulty in disposing of his opponent.

It was his idea that the odds were great the stranger would not be familiar with the use of weapons, and so the lawyer would have a great advantage.

"We slipped up in our calculations," the major muttered as he rode on.

"The Yankee is a far better man than we

expected, and Tourjay is wise in giving the job of getting rid of him into the hands of this Black Jake.

"It is always better to do a trick of that kind by proxy."

During the ride the major indulged in reflections of this kind and the time passed rapidly away, for as the gambler was mounted on a good horse it did not take him long to reach the swamp where Black Jake had his cabin.

The man sat outside of his log house as the major rode up.

He was a thin, loosely-built fellow, with a long face, covered with a shock of yellow hair; the expression, slab-sided, fitted him exactly.

All he wore was a pair of butternut-colored, homespun pantaloons, a rough, woolen shirt, and stout brogans.

He was bare-headed, and sat on a box with his feet against a tree, looking as though he was half asleep, and he paid no attention whatever to the major when he dismounted and fastened his horse to a sapling by the roadside.

"How are you?" said the major.

"How'd'y," responded the other.

"You are the man whom they call Black Jake?"

"I reckon that is my handle."

"You are the man I want to see then."

"I reckon I am here to be seen," the other replied in his peculiar, languid way, speaking as though it was considerable trouble for him to talk.

"I have a little important business that I want to speak to you about," the gambler observed with a scrutinizing glance around.

"Is there any danger of anybody overhearing what I say?"

"I reckon not. Thar ain't a soul 'round as far as I know."

Again the major surveyed the surroundings.

The house was in the center of an open space, five or six hundred feet square, and the spot where the man sat was at least a hundred feet from the house, so that if they spoke in a cautious tone there was no danger of an eavesdropper being able to play the spy upon them.

There was a stump within a yard of where Black Jake sat, and the major seated himself upon it.

"I came to see you in behalf of Mr. Alexander Tourjay," the old gambler announced.

A sudden gleam of light shot from the eyes of Black Jake and he nodded significantly as the major held up his hand so he could see Tourjay's signet ring upon his finger.

"Yas, Alex is a good man," the fellow remarked with a drawl.

"He is a friend of yours I believe?"

"Oh, yes."

"And if he needed a man to help him out of a hole I reckon that you would be just the fellow to be glad to do it, eh?"

"Yas, I would help Alex all I kin. He has been a good friend to me and I am jest the kind of a galoot what always sticks to my friends."

"That is the calculation that Tourjay made, and as he needs a little assistance he sent me to you."

"All right! go ahead! What does he want?" Black Jake asked, for the first time betraying some interest.

"I will soon explain that to you," the major replied, and then he proceeded to relate what had occurred.

Black Jake listened intently, but made no remark until the major came to the end of his narrative, then he discarded the tobacco which he had been chewing vigorously, helped himself to a fresh supply, and after tending the plug to the gambler who declined with thanks, remarked:

"This hyer Yankee 'pears to be a right peart galoot with the sword."

"Oh, yes, there isn't any doubt about that, and Tourjay feels mighty sore over the matter, you understand, and he wouldn't be sorry if some piece of ill-luck happened to the New Yorker."

"Wouldn't cry, hey?"

"No, not much."

"Wa-al, this is a dreadful unhealthy section of the country sometimes, particularly for strangers who don't know no more than to buck up ag'in' some man like Tourjay who

has got lots of friends," the squatter observed with a grin.

"You think that it is likely then that this New Yorker will find that the climate does not agree with him before he has tarried long in this section."

"That is my idee, and I am the kind of galoot what don't make many mistakes 'bout a thing of this kind!" Black Jake declared, in a dogmatic way.

"I will tell Tourjay what you say, and I am sure he will be pleased," the veteran gambler remarked, rising as he spoke.

"You kin tell Alex that he kin allers count on me," Black Jake responded.

"I ain't one of the kind what says much, you understand, for I ain't no talker by a jugful, but I mean what I say, and you kin jest bet your bottom dollar on it, too!"

"Well, I should judge from what I have seen of you that you are the kind of man whom it is safe to tie to."

"You kin bet your life on that!" Black Jake exclaimed, emphatically, for the first time betraying some animation.

"No talker, stranger, but when it comes to actual work I am all thar, every time."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a man coming along the by-path which led from the main road to the log cabin of the squatter.

The path was fringed by a scanty growth of trees and bushes so that it was possible for any one coming along the crooked way to get within a couple of hundred feet of the cabin before they were likely to be observed.

The man came sauntering along with his eyes bent on the ground apparently looking for something.

He was a medium-sized man with rugged features upon which however sat a guileless look, and he had the appearance of a countryman.

From his costume one would be apt to come to the conclusion that his lot in life had not been a prosperous one for he was very poorly dressed, wearing an old coat and pantaloons very much the worse for wear, with a dingy gray flannel shirt and an old slouch hat, the original color of which it would have puzzled a conjurer to have told.

"Who is this?" the major remarked.

"I dunno; I never see'd him afore," Black Jake answered.

The stranger got within one hundred feet of the pair before he seemed to be conscious of their presence.

Then, having reached the cleared ground around the house he raised his eyes, caught sight of the two, and bowed to them in the most friendly way while a broad grin came over his face.

The major returned the salutation politely, as it was his nature to be courteous to all with whom he came in contact, but Black Jake simply stared at the stranger in his dull, dumb way.

"How'd-y?" exclaimed the man when he came within speaking distance.

"Quite well, I thank you; how are you?" the major remarked.

Black Jake merely nodded his head.

"Wal, I ain't quite so well as I might be," the other responded.

"Still, I don't suppose that I have got any right to complain as long as I am able to crawl along all right."

"Is this hyer Black Jake's cabin?"

The gambler nodded to the squatter and he nodded assent to the stranger.

"And which one of you-uns is Black Jake if I may make so bold as to ask?" the man questioned.

Again the major nodded to Jake and the squatter said:

"I reckon I am Black Jake."

"Jess so!" exclaimed the stranger with a very good-natured grin. "I was kinder thinking that it was that way, but I wasn't sure, you know, and that is the reason why I axed."

"Say, Mister Jake, kin I git to stay with you for a while?"

This abrupt question so astonished the squatter that he stared open mouthed at the stranger.

"I reckoned that you would be surprised," the man observed with another grin.

"But when you hear what I am arter you will see that it is mighty important for me to

get a place to stay somewhere in this hyer neighborhood.

"My name is Harvey Shock and my business is peddling," he exclaimed. "I travel throughout the country selling all sorts of things, but lately I have been peddling a cough cure—the Old Quaker Cough Cure—and I tell you what it is, gents, it is the biggest thing of the kind that was ever got up in this country or any other country under the sun."

"But the doctor who made the stuff is dead, died mighty suddenly, but he left me the receipt for making the cough cure, so I am all right."

"That was lucky for you," the major remarked.

"You bet it was!" Shock declared, emphatically. "But thar is one little thing 'bout the stuff which kinder upsets me."

"This hyer cough cure is made of roots and yarbs and thar's one sartin root which is mighty skeerce."

"The old doctor used for to get it in a swamp down near Alexandria where he lived, but the supply has gi'n out, and the old nigger, the doctor's man who was raised up around these hyer parts told me I would find plenty of the roots in this hyer Blue Gum Swamp, so I want to git to stay at some house in the neighborhood while I hunt the thing up."

"Ah, yes, I see," the major responded.

"I don't reckon, you know, to live on no man," the peddler declared with another one of the broad grins.

"I ain't rich by a jugful, but I kin pay my way for a while yet, and jest as soon as I git hold of this hyer pesky root I kin wade in and make a barrel of money."

"Oh, by the way, I clear forgot!" Shock exclaimed, abruptly.

"Will you have a drink, gentlemen?" and he drew a pint flask from his pocket.

The pair accepted the invitation and as the whisky was good stuff Black Jake consented to entertain the stranger.

The major took his departure.

"If anything happens to the New Yorker, and the deed is traced to Black Jake, my conference with him might give rise to some talk if the peddler should happen to let it out," the major mused as he rode away.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WARNING.

JUDGE WHALEY sat in his library.

It is three days since the events related in our last chapter occurred, and about all the characters in our story had taken up their quarters in Sulphurville, as the thriving village situated on the bank of the Red River was called.

The session of the court was over, and the judge and the lawyers were free to go where they pleased.

As the doctor had predicted, Tourjay's wound healed rapidly, and he was able to return to Sulphurville, where on his plantation he could receive the best of care.

The New Yorker, De Berry, also came to Sulphurville, being the guest of Lawyer Wolfe, who resided with his mother in a modest house in the suburbs of the town.

Judge Whaley's plantation was only a mile away from Sulphurville, being situated on the river road.

The evening mail had just been brought from the village and the judge was occupied in examining his letters.

There wasn't anything in any of them to excite particular attention until he came to the very last one.

This was directed in a miserable hand and the postmark showed that it had been mailed in Sulphurville.

The old gentleman perused the letter and then he was so much surprised that he read it aloud.

It was a fearful scrawl, and ran as follows, beginning in the most abrupt manner:

"Do you want your darter to marry a cussed Yankee? If you don't then you had better keep your eyes open. I am a friend of yourn and so I give you this tip. Look out sharp and no more from yourn truly."

This was all there was to the letter, no signature and the judge was greatly puzzled.

"As a rule, a man is a donkey to take any

notice of any communications of this kind," he mused.

"I do not believe there is any truth in the warning, still it will not do any harm to speak to Alberta about the matter.

He touched the bell and when a negro boy came in answer to the summons, desired him to tell Miss Alberta that her presence was required in the library.

In a few minutes the daughter appeared.

"Did you wish to see me, father?" she asked.

"Yes, sit down, I want to talk to you."

Alberta took a seat upon the opposite side of the table to where the judge was seated.

"I have received a letter which is somewhat of a puzzle," the father said.

"Suppose that you take a look at the document and see what you can make out of it," and as he spoke he handed the letter to his daughter.

Alberta read the warning and immediately flushed scarlet to the very roots of her hair.

The judge was watching her narrowly and being a good judge of human nature at once jumped to the conclusion from what he saw written on her features that the anonymous letter-writer had made a shrewd guess at the truth.

"Of course there isn't any truth in this warning," the father remarked in a careless way.

"There isn't any love affair between yourself and this Northerner?" he continued, watching the girl as narrowly as a cat does a mouse.

"Father, I am going to tell you the truth about the matter, of course," Alberta said, after a moment's pause, and although she was dreadfully agitated she looked the judge straight in the eyes.

"Of course, my dear girl, that goes without saying," the father replied.

"I met the gentleman during my last visit to the North and from the beginning we were each attracted to the other.

"There wasn't any flirtation between us for I am not one of the flirty kind and neither is he."

"He certainly does seem to be very much of a gentleman," the judge observed in a reflective way.

"When we parted he asked permission to correspond, and I replied that I would prefer not to do so, then he told me in a very plain, straightforward manner that I had made a great impression upon him and he would be delighted to be afforded an opportunity to win me for his wife."

"He evidently believes in making hay while the sun shines," the old gentleman declared, with pursed-up lips.

"Well, it was the last opportunity that he would have to speak to me and I suppose he thought that he ought to improve it."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"I replied by quoting the old saying in regard to absence conquering love, and said that if after a few months he was of the same opinion as he was at present and cared to seek me in my Southern home I would be glad to see him, although I would not promise that anything serious would result from his visit," and the girl smiled, coquettishly, in the face of the old gentleman as she spoke.

"Ah, yes, but you held out a strong inducement for him to make the trial," the judge asserted, in a grumbling tone.

"Oh, yes, I suppose that is the truth."

"Then there is no engagement between you and this Mr. De Berry?"

"None whatever."

"But is there likely to be?"

And the judge put the question as sharply as though he was on the bench with a criminal before him.

"Father, I am not going to attempt to deceive you about this matter," the girl replied, after a moment's pause, during which she had apparently been screwing her courage up to the sticking point.

"That is right, my dear child—quite right!" the old gentleman exclaimed, in a softer tone. "Tell me the truth—always tell the truth without regard to the consequences!"

"Father, I always have done so, and I trust that I always will, although at the present time it is a hard trial for I presume that you will be displeased."

The old gentleman fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"Well, well, I hope not," he declared.

"I like Mr. De Berry—like him better than any one whom I have ever encountered, and I feel sure that he thinks a great deal of me."

"In this case, you see, absence did not conquer love, on the contrary, our separation seemed to increase the liking that we had for each other."

"He has taken the trouble to come to the South after me, and I think that if he should ask me to be his wife I should have to refer him to you."

"Meaning that you are perfectly willing to accept him?" the judge asked testily.

The girl hesitated for a moment, and then, summoning her courage, replied:

"Yes."

"But I do not like the idea of this at all!" the judge declared, jumping to his feet, and beginning to pace up and down the room.

The daughter watched him for a moment and then she said:

"You do not like it?"

"No, I do not, and I will never give my consent to such a union."

"What objection is there to the gentleman?"

"In the first place, he is a Northerner, and I don't like Yankees."

"Ah, father, that is only an idle prejudice, you know," Alberta replied archly.

"The war ended long ago, and we are all Americans now."

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that fact, but I don't want a Yankee for a son-in-law, all the same."

"You have no objection to find with the gentleman himself?"

"Oh, no," the judge replied slowly and with evident reluctance. "He seems to be a good sort of a fellow enough, but I don't like the idea of your marrying a man from a remote section of the country."

"Why couldn't you have made a choice from among the young gentlemen in the neighborhood?"

"I am sure there are plenty of eligible suitors near at hand, and I think that you ought to have taken one of them."

"This passion that we call love, is a very serious thing, father," the girl remarked with a very serious air.

"The wisest men have never been able to decide why it is that certain men and women are attracted to each other."

"And in my own case I can't explain to you how it is that I do like Mr. De Berry, and do not like any of the gentlemen in the neighborhood, the most of whom I have known since we were boys and girls together."

"It is very strange," the old judge commented. "The New Yorker is a nice fellow enough, but no more so than a dozen of the others."

"Ah, yes, but my eyes see something in him which I do not see in any of the rest!" Alberta exclaimed.

"Now there is Tourjay for instance! If there is one man in this neighborhood whom I would have selected from all the rest as being best calculated to make you a good husband it is Alexander Tourjay."

A look of disdain appeared on the face of the Southern girl and she raised her head haughtily.

"How strange that is!" she declared.

"Strange?" asked the father in surprise.

"Yes, for of all the men whom I have ever met Alexander Tourjay would be the last one whom I would choose for a husband."

"You surprise me!"

"It is the truth, and I am astonished that you should think he is worthy to be your son-in-law."

"What objection is there to the man?"

"His character!"

"Eh?" and the old gentleman appeared to be a trifle uncomfortable.

"In a neighborhood like this the shortcomings of all the people are known to each other."

"Is it not the truth that Mr. Tourjay is an extremely hard drinker?"

"Oh, well, I presume that the young fellow does indulge in a little more liquor than is good for him at times," the judge explained, trying to put the best possible face upon the matter.

"At times!" Alberta exclaimed. "If the gossips of the town are to be believed it is the exception and not the rule for Mr. Tourjay to go to bed sober."

"My dear Alberta, this is an evil-minded world, given greatly to exaggeration too and you must not believe all that you hear."

"I do not think there is much doubt in regard to the truth of these stories," Alberta remarked with a curl of her proud lip.

"And then too is not the man an inveterate gambler?" she asked.

"Oh, well, almost everybody plays cards for money in this section, you know," the old gentleman explained, endeavoring to put as good a face upon the matter as possible.

"I presume that is the truth, but I think it is also true that no one but a professional gambler would play as recklessly as Mr. Tourjay is said to do."

"Why, father, if reports can be believed, he has gambled away everything in the world that he could possibly lose."

The judge began to be annoyed, for he felt that the girl was getting the best of the discussion.

"My dear Alberta, you must not believe all that you hear!" he exclaimed.

"I do not doubt that the young man has been rather wild, but it is my impression that he has not been any worse than the rest of the young men with whom he associates, and it is certain that as far as ability and genius goes there isn't a young fellow in the country—or the State, either, as far as my knowledge goes—who can at all compare with him."

"Yes, I presume that he is a talented man," the girl responded with an air of indifference which plainly showed that she took no interest in the matter.

"He has the making of a great lawyer in him and I should not be surprised to see him ranked with the very best legal lights in the country in less than ten years."

"But, father, unless he turns over a new leaf will not his habits keep him back?"

"Ah, yes, but he will soon stop. Almost all young men, you know, are more or less wild, but after having their fling they settle down, and Tourjay will do the same I am sure."

"Possibly," the daughter responded. But she spoke in a way which indicated that she had considerable doubts in regard to the matter.

"Don't you think that you could bring yourself to look with a favorable eye upon Mr. Tourjay?" the old gentleman asked, in a persuasive tone.

"No, father; I will be frank with you, for I know I could never bring myself to like the gentleman."

"I am very much disappointed indeed!" the judge exclaimed, testily.

"You see, my dear, I had made up my mind that he would make you an excellent husband."

"It is impossible, father!" the girl declared, firmly. "I would do almost anything for you, but I would rather die than marry Mr. Tourjay if I was compelled to choose between the two."

"But I do not like the idea of your marrying a Yankee at all."

Alberta laughed.

"He couldn't help being born at the North, you know," she responded. "And I think when you come to know him well that you will be inclined to look over that misfortune."

This set the judge to laughing and brought the interview to an end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIENDLY ADVICE.

THE house of Nathan Wolfe where the New Yorker, De Berry, was domiciled as a guest, was situated on the outskirts of the town.

It was a pretty one-storied cottage, all overgrown with roses and climbing vines, and stood in the center of a neatly-kept garden.

At exactly the same time in the evening of the interview between the judge and his daughter, Wolfe and the New Yorker sat by the bay window of the cozy parlor which looked out on the front garden, enjoying a smoke.

"I was talking with the doctor just before supper to-day, by the way, about Tourjay's case," Wolfe remarked.

"What did he say?"

"The wound is healing up rapidly and Tourjay will be out next week."

"Well, I am not sorry," De Berry remarked, in a thoughtful way. "I did not seek the man's life and I am glad that no serious results will follow the wound."

"If you had cared to, I fancy that you could have killed him without any trouble."

"Yes, I held his life at my mercy, but I only tried to disable him."

"I fancy that the moment Tourjay gets well, you will have to look out for yourself," Wolfe declared with a warning shake of the head.

The New Yorker looked surprised.

"Is that your opinion? Don't you think that he will be satisfied with the lesson that he has already received?"

"No, I do not. You see, I know the man thoroughly, for we were brought up together, and so I possess a complete knowledge of his character, and from his boyhood he has been noted for his vindictive disposition; one of the kind who treasures up wrongs and then, when it is least expected, endeavors to obtain revenge."

"In that case then, I suppose that I have made a mistake in considering the affair settled," De Berry remarked, and it was plain from the look on his face that he was not pleased by the prospect.

"That is my idea. Of course it is possible that I may be mistaken about the matter, but I do not think I am."

"Do you suppose that he will challenge me again?"

"No, I do not think so. I have not as good an opinion as that of the man," Wolfe replied promptly.

"As I told you, he is vindictive, and a man apt to cherish his wrongs."

"You have inflicted a fearful defeat upon him; really, it is the first that he has ever encountered, for although he has been concerned in a dozen skirmishes, this is the first one that I ever heard of in which he has not succeeded in coming out first best."

"Well, under the circumstances, it is no wonder that he may be expected to seek for revenge, if he is such a man as you describe."

"And it is my idea that he will not proceed openly, either," Wolfe asserted.

"He will not dare to challenge you to another meeting in the open field, for he has been taught by sad experience that he is no match for you; nothing, then, is left for him but a secret attack."

"And do you really think that the man would be base enough to try anything of the kind?"

"Yes, I do," Wolfe replied immediately. "I know that it is a hard thing to say of a man, but I am telling you just what I think about the matter."

"For the last ten years Tourjay has been going rapidly to the dogs."

"He is an excellent lawyer—really a genius, and I don't know a man in this section who is his equal, but whisky and gambling have been his ruin."

"I have been watching the man for some time, and I feel sure that he must be getting very near to the end of his rope."

"He is a most unlucky gambler, but the greater his losses the more determined he seems to be to play."

"His father left him a handsome property and his legal practice brings him in a good income, but a man must be a millionaire to go on losing hundreds of dollars night after night."

"Yes, it must be a long purse indeed to stand a strain of that sort."

"As I told you I have been watching the man very closely for the last two or three months, and I think that he came to the conclusion that he could retrieve his fortunes by a marriage with Judge Whaley's daughter."

"The judge has a very high opinion of Tourjay and, strange to say, is inclined to look with a lenient eye upon his sowing his wild oats as the old gentleman terms it."

"I fancy that he will find it difficult to get the young lady to look with a favorable eye upon his suit," De Berry remarked with a confident smile.

"Yes, but I have no doubt he thinks he can through the father get her to consent,

but your arrival here has made him suspect that all is not going to be plain sailing and if that is so it would explain his attack on you."

"Very true; and as he has failed the first time he will be likely to try a second."

"That is my idea and that is why I say that it would be wise for you to be on your guard."

"Yes, you are right."

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the approach of a man through the garden from the street.

He came directly up to the open window by which the two young men sat and greeted them with a polite bow.

I reckon I would like to have a leetle talk with you two gents, if you hain't got no big objection," the man said.

It was the traveling medicine peddler, Harvey Shock, who had taken up his quarters with Black Jake in the Blue Gum Swamp.

"No objection! Come in!" Wolfe replied.

Shock entered the house and took a seat in the corner of the room, so that he could not be seen through the windows by any one passing along the street.

"This is Mister Wolfe, I s'pose?" he asked, nodding to the gentleman.

"Yes."

"And this hyer is Mister De Berry, the gent from the North," Shock continued with a bow to the New Yorker.

De Berry nodded assent.

"Wal, gents, I have got something important to say to you, and as I have got to do it on the quiet I hope you will not let out who it was that put you up to the time of day."

The young men looked surprised at this speech, and Wolfe, as the host, took it upon himself to respond.

"You can rely upon our discretion," he responded.

"My name is Shock—Harvey Shock and I peddle medicines—patent stuff, you understand. I come down in this hyer country in s'arch of some roots which I heered could be found in the Blue Gum Swamp—that is 'bout two miles above this hyer town, you know."

The others nodded assent.

"And in order to be near at hand I got a low-down cuss named Black Jake to let me stay in his shanty."

"Jake is a powerful big drinker, you know, and as I had a good supply of whisky on hand the pair of us have got as thick as thieves."

"I allers have to carry a lot of whisky around with me 'cos I am subject to the dumb ague, and that is the only thing what does me any good," the peddler explained.

Again the others nodded.

"Black Jake is a dumb sort of a hound—never does no talking, you know, to amount to anything, but when he gets a good dose of whisky on board he has a queer habit of mumbling to himself."

"Now, I am one of the kind of men who prides himself on saying nothing and sawing wood," Shock added with a grin.

"And as I have taken so much whisky for my ague the stuff don't seem to have much effect upon me; I believe I could drink a barrel full of it without gitting phased."

"That is, you keep your senses and the other man acn't," Wolf observed.

"You have hit it plum center!" the peddler exclaimed.

"Wal, the long and the short of the matter is that Black Jake is going to do you a mischief, stranger, as soon as he kin, and it is all on account of the fight you had with Lawyer Tourjay."

The friends exchanged glances.

"Of course I don't take any particular interest in the affair, for I don't know either you or the other chap, but it didn't strike me that it was quite the right sort of a thing for this dumb dog to salivate you without your having a chance for your life, so I made up my mind to give you a bit of warning," the peddler said to the New Yorker.

"I am very much obliged, indeed, to you for your trouble, and if you care to accept a reward for your services I will be glad to pay it," De Berry remarked.

"Wal, stranger, although I ain't got any more money than I know what to do with,

yet I reckon I don't want any money for a leetle thing like this," Shock replied.

"This hyer dumb dog is a mean, miserable sort of a hound anyway, and it kinder went against my grain for to think that such a low-down cuss as he is should try to wipe out a man like yourself."

"You want to keep your eyes open all the time, you know, for he is jest the kind of a man who will try to get at you when you least expect it."

"He won't challenge you to a fair fight, or give you any show for your life," the peddler explained. "'Cos it ain't in the critter to play a game of that kind."

"That statement is correct, I am satisfied, from what I know of the man," Wolfe declared.

"Wal, I will be gitting," Shock remarked, rising as he spoke.

"Tain't likely that you will be troubled to-night, for I left Black Jake so full of whisky that he ain't capable of moving."

"I had to come to town for a fresh supply and so I thought I would improve the opportunity to give you a bit of warning, and, by the way, I think that the man who calls himself Major Kaufman is mixed up in this thing 'cos he was out to see Black Jake the other day and I reckon that it was about this hyer business."

"You will have to keep your eyes on the major," Shock warned. "He pretends to be a planter but in reality he is a boss gambler from New Orleans," and then the man departed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BULLY OF THE TOWN.

"THIS is a serious matter," Wolfe observed after the peddler had disappeared in the gloom.

"I have known this Black Jake for years. He is one of the black sheep of the neighborhood, and although he has never cut much of a figure in the desperado line, yet he is just the kind of man who would be capable of lying in wait for a fellow behind some bush with the idea of filling him full of buckshot."

"That is he would not hesitate to commit a cold-blooded murder if he stood a good chance of escaping punishment."

"Exactly! that is just the kind of man he is," Wolfe replied.

"I must take especial pains to be on my guard then."

"Yes, the point is to be careful not to give the man a chance at you. The odds are great, you know, that he will not make an open attack, and if he can't get a chance to ambush you he will not be able to do anything."

"I will be careful, and now that I have received timely warning it will be strange indeed if I cannot beat the fellow's game."

"You are not in the habit of carrying weapons?"

"No, I am not."

"Under such circumstances as these though it would only be prudent for you to go armed to the teeth."

"Yes, I suppose that it would, for if I was not armed and anybody should succeed in attacking me I would be helpless."

"You are right and no mistake," Wolfe exclaimed. "This is a case where the old joke comes in. A man may live in this country for twenty years and not feel the need of a weapon, but when he does need a gun he needs it awful bad!"

"I will buy a brace of revolvers this very night!"

"That is where you are wise! Get self-acting tools, and it would not be a bad idea to make the purchase openly so that the report will go the rounds that you are prepared for war," the young lawyer suggested.

"That is a good idea."

"Yes, I think so. A man is not half as apt to be attacked if it is known that he is all ready for the war-path."

"As it happens, too, I am a good snap revolver-shot, for I was a member of a revolver club, too."

"Within the last few years there has been a great interest taken by the New Yorkers in sports of this kind."

"It is a lucky thing that you are an ex-

pert, for if you was not you wouldn't stand much chance for your life," Wolfe observed.

"This revelation by the peddler satisfied me that my suspicion was correct in regard to Tourjay seeking revenge.

"He is naturally vindictive and will be apt to do all in his power to injure you."

"Is he and this Black Jake on friendly terms?"

"Yes; he is the man's lawyer and has succeeded in getting the fellow out of some ugly scrapes.

"The man is naturally grateful and as he has never been able to pay the lawyer much money for his services he would undoubtedly be glad to improve this opportunity to square the account, for Black Jake is a thoroughpaced scoundrel, and from what I know of the man I am satisfied that he would not hesitate at any crime if there was a fair chance for him to escape."

"I will be on my guard, and if I am well-armed the chances are good, I think, that I will be able to hold my own against Tourjay and his ruffians."

"His fortunes are in a desperate state and a marriage with the judge's daughter is about the only thing which promises him relief, and therefore it is only natural for him to make a determined effort to get you out of the way, for I am satisfied that he has got the idea in his head that you are destined to prove a dangerous rival."

"Well, I am certainly not going to be frightened out of the field as long as I think there is a chance for success," the New Yorker remarked in a decided way.

"I don't know what the judge will think about the matter when I enter suit for his daughter, but I am certain that Alberta is favorably disposed toward me."

"Well, from what I know of the young lady I fancy that if she makes up her mind to marry a man neither her father or anybody else would be able to make her give him up until a good and sufficient reason was advanced."

"I think you are right, Alberta is a conscientious girl and although she would listen to reason yet she would not be inclined to yield a blind obedience in a matter of this kind where the whole of her life's happiness appeared to her to be at stake."

"It is my opinion that if the girl makes up her mind to marry you she will carry her point in spite of the judge's opposition," Wolfe declared.

"I have known Judge Whaley ever since I was a child, and although the old gentleman can be firm enough at times yet he is of a rather easy-going nature, and as he thinks there isn't anybody in the world like his daughter it is certain that if she makes a stubborn fight he will be likely to give way and allow her to do as she likes, although he resist for a while."

"I think that the lady and I understand each other although there isn't really any engagement between us."

Then Wolfe consulted his watch.

"We had better be going if you intend to purchase your revolvers to-night or else the stores will be closed," he suggested.

"All right, let us go at once," De Berry replied. "I think this is a case where the quicker action is taken the better."

"My own idea exactly!" Wolfe declared.

Then the two proceeded to the street and made their way to the center of the town where there were half-a-dozen stores.

The largest one of these places of business was a general country store kept by a Hebrew who answered to the name of Moses Cohen.

"You will find the old Jew to be a tolerably decent fellow," Wolfe explained.

"He keeps almost everything that a man, woman or child is likely to need and his prices are reasonable, when the distance from a large city is taken into consideration."

"Cohen's Bazar, as he calls it, and the hotel are the favorite lounging places of the town, and after nightfall there is always a lot of gossips to be found in both places, so if you purchase a couple of revolvers you can depend upon it that the news of the transaction will be spread far and wide."

"That is just what I want, of course," the New Yorker replied.

The pair then entered the store.

The old Jew was a brisk little man with

iron-gray hair, a long beard of the same hue, and eyes so round and black that they strongly resembled jet beads.

He came forward as soon as the young men entered and greeted them as though they were the dearest friends that he had.

The lawyer introduced the New Yorker and explained that he wanted to invest in a pair of the best double-action revolvers.

There were about a dozen men lounging in the back of the store, where the Jew had a couple of benches for the accommodation of his customers, and they immediately became vastly interested.

The majority of the men knew the New Yorker by sight, and those who were ignorant in regard to who he was were soon informed by the others.

The loungers nodded to each other knowingly when they discovered what the New Yorker wanted, for they scented war immediately.

Cohen declared that he had some beautiful weapons and was sure he could suit the gentleman.

The Jew, really, did have a good assortment and it did not take De Berry long to pick out a pair.

He took the best of the lot and paid the price without a murmur.

Then after the usual fashion in the Southwest, the storekeeper invited the gentlemen to enter the little private room in the rear of the store and there he set out the whisky.

It is counted bad manners in the Red River country to refuse an invitation of this sort and so the pair took an extremely small drink of the liquor.

Then they departed.

"As long as we are up town we may as well drop into the hotel and see what is going on," Wolfe suggested.

De Berry had no objections and so the two entered the hotel.

Like most of the houses of entertainment to be found in the small Southern town, it was but a step from the hotel office into the bar-room and here was where the loungers congregated.

All eyes were directed upon the pair as soon as they entered, and speedily the whisper went around that the good-looking stranger was the man who had laid the Southern fire-eater low.

The group nearest the door was composed of Judge Whaley and three up-river planters one of whom was a client of Wolfe and he accosted the lawyer as soon as he entered.

Then Wolfe introduced his companion to the three planters—the judge already knew him—and the conversation became a general one.

But within a couple of minutes there came an interruption.

Into the saloon came a big, brawny fellow, very poorly dressed, and his inflamed countenance seemed to indicate that he had drunk more liquor than was good for him.

He was a coarse, brutal-looking man, and from the way he carried himself, was evidently a bully of the first water.

He advanced to the bar and brought his fist down upon it with a thump which attracted the attention of everybody in the room.

"My name is Billy Buck, and don't you forget it?" he roared at the top of his lungs.

"I am a Southern gentleman, I am, and I don't take a back seat for any man on top of this hyer footstool!"

And then again he whacked the counter with his fist.

"I am a man, too, all of me, from the sole of my head to the crown of my foot!"

This declaration caused some of the bystanders to smile, and as the new-comer had not drank liquor enough to deaden his senses he was quick to observe the broad grin on the faces of those in the room.

"What are you galoots snickering at?" he demanded, angrily. "Don't you know a gentleman when you see him?"

Then he strode up to where De Berry stood and glanced in an angry way at the New Yorker.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ASTONISHED MAN.

THIS abrupt movement on the part of Buck took everybody in the room by surprise.

Owing to his size the man set up for a

bully, and when he had a little more liquor than was good for him, was accustomed to come into the public places of the town, strut around a little with the air of being king of the walk, and announce that he could whip any man in the neighborhood.

As a rule no one ever took any notice of these boasts, although on a few occasions some man who had drank so much as to be incapable of sound reasoning was foolish enough to accept Billy Buck's challenge.

Then would follow a brief contest and the bully had always succeeded in getting the best of the struggle.

But for him to go out of his way and pitch upon a stranger was something new, and the bystanders stared in surprise.

It was evident though that Buck meant to pick a quarrel with De Berry, for he approached him in an extremely offensive way.

"Say! I don't know you!" the bully cried in a loud and angry tone.

"You are a stranger in these hyer parts, I reckon, and I want you to understand right to once that I am a man w'ot don't stand any nonsense from any one."

"You can't snicker at me, dog-gone you!"

"Sir, you are laboring under a mistake," De Berry replied, quietly. "I have not laughed at you, nor concerned myself about you in any way whatsoever."

"Oh, you want to git out of it now that you see that I am going to call you down!" the bully exclaimed, jeeringly.

"I am not trying to get out of anything, to the best of my knowledge and belief," De Berry replied, his coolness and self-possession a decided contrast to the bluster and bravado of the big fellow.

"I reckon that you are a heap wise not for to try any of your games with me, for I am a bad man from Bitter Creek, I am!"

And then the bully drew himself up to his full height, threw out his chest and brandished his big arms in the air.

"I'm one of the galoots w'ot likes to smell of blood. I'm a wolf, I am! Yes, siree, you kin jest bet all that you are worth on that, I am a wolf, and when I git on the war-path and begin to howl the man who don't take to his heels and run is mighty apt to wish that he had never been born."

Then he pounded his chest with his big fists and looked around with the air of a conquering hero.

Thinking that the best way to avoid a difficulty would be to ignore the fellow as much as possible De Berry turned to the judge as if to address a remark to him.

But the bully had his eyes on the New Yorker and the instant De Berry moved he roared:

"Hyar you, Mister Man! I am a-talking to you I am, and I want you to understand that you can't treat me in no sich way as that! I have got the floor I have, and I want you for to turn around and look me square in the face, dog-gone you!"

De Berry was a patient man and of all things he hated to become involved in a quarrel with a bar-room bully, but he was sensible enough to understand that there were times when such a thing could not be avoided.

Wise enough too to comprehend that when a man was so unfortunate as to become involved in an affair of the kind the best way to get out of it was promptly to take the bull by the horns as the saying is.

There was no doubt that the fellow intended to pick a quarrel with him.

Of course there wasn't any reason why the man should single him out excepting that he was a stranger, and then the thought had come to the New Yorker when the fellow appeared to be so determined upon being offensive, that it might be possible it was the lawyer Tourjay who had instigated the man to pick a quarrel with him.

Perhaps it was his defeated rival's idea that this big bully would be able to give him a terrible pounding and so disgrace him in the opinion of the people of the town.

But when he reflected upon this supposition the New Yorker laughed in his sleeve.

As a middleweight boxer he had ranked as the champion of his college, and in his time had met and defeated some of the best amateur boxers of the day.

That was only a few years ago, and as he was still young in years, and had always taken the best of care of himself, so that he

was in a splendid condition physically, he had not a doubt but what he could "handle" this big, fat, clumsy fellow, for the chances were great that the man knew no more about boxing than he did of the interior of Africa.

"I am about tired of this, you overgrown donkey!" De Berry cried with a suddenness which surprised all the hearers.

"You have made a fool of yourself long enough and it is about time a stop was put to your antics."

This unexpected speech took Billy Buck so completely by surprise that all he could do for a moment or two was to stare in wonder at the New Yorker.

Then, recovering from his amazement, he said:

"Wa-al, I'll be durned! Say! do you want me to smash you all to nothing afore you kin say Jack Robinson?"

"Oh, you will not smash anybody!" the New Yorker retorted, emphatically.

"You are only a big gas-bag—as full of wind as a balloon, but I am tired of your monkey shines and if you do not stop I will kick you into the street!"

The big fellow grew fairly black in the face with rage, while the bystanders looked on in wonder.

As a rule the men of the interior Southern villages knew but little of boxing, and so the inhabitants of Sulphurville had come to regard Billy Buck as being a real champion because he had succeeded in getting the best of the drunken fellows whom he had encountered.

The idea then that this Northerner who was apparently not a match at all physically for the village bully should dare to talk about kicking him into the street astounded them.

"Say, you dog-goned Yankee! I reckon that you must be clean out of your head!" Billy Buck exclaimed in profound astonishment.

"Oh, no, I am in full possession of all my senses I believe!" the New Yorker replied.

"Didn't I understand you for to say that you would kick me out of this hyer saloon?" the big fellow demanded, and as he spoke he shook his head in a puzzled way as if he could not believe that he had heard aright.

"Yes, that is just what I said, and I mean every word of it too!" De Berry retorted.

"Such fellows as you are a disgrace to the town in which they live! You are a bully and a blowhard and the only way to get along with you would be to unceremoniously kick you into the street the moment you commenced your foolishness."

"I reckon I will have to hammer some sense into you!" the bully declared, brandishing his arms in a warlike way.

"That is more than any one could succeed in doing with you to my thinking," the New Yorker rejoined.

"I fancy that all the pounding in the world would not make you sensible!"

"Look out for me for I am a-coming!" Billy Buck declared, brandishing his big fists.

"Are you all ready?" De Berry asked, stepping forward a pace, and throwing himself into a boxing attitude.

"You bet I am ready!" the big fellow exclaimed. "Ready to smash you as you have never been smashed afore in all your born days!"

The bully brandished his fist to give emphasis to his threat.

Then, so quickly that half the lookers-on did not see the blow, the New Yorker planted a straight right-hander on the jaw of Billy Buck which sent him over on his back as though he had been shot.

The spectators were silent for a moment, amazed by the wonderful celerity and force of the stroke and then they roared in delight.

Billy Buck was no favorite in the town and the bystanders were not sorry to see him come to grief.

As the bully struck the floor a howl escaped from him which seemed more like the utterance of a wild beast than the cry of a human.

Never in all his life had he received such a blow.

Fearfully exasperated, he scrambled to his

feet as soon as possible and made a rush at the New Yorker.

The bully was game.

He was so ignorant of boxing that he regarded the blow as a chance one and thought he could bear down his adversary by his superior weight.

It was like child's play for an experienced boxer like the New Yorker to deal with such a clumsy fellow.

As Buck came rushing in, De Berry measured the distance and gave him another right-hander on the jaw which brought the big fellow up "all a-standing" as the sailors say.

Then without a moment's delay he "let go" with the left at Buck's body.

The blow landed just over the heart

It was a fearful stroke.

The bully doubled up with pain and a groan was wrung from his lips.

Then again came the terrible right-hander.

This time it took the big fellow between the eyes and again he went over on his back.

At this second downfall the men in the saloon set up such a yell that it was heard in the street and people came running from all parts toward the hotel, eager to see what was the matter.

Never since the town of Sulphurville had been founded had such a contest taken place within its limits.

It was fully a couple of minutes before the bully made any movement.

He lay on his back with his eyes half closed, breathing heavily, for the breath had been almost completely knocked out of him by the "rib-roaster" which he had received.

Then he rose slowly to a sitting position and gazed at the New Yorker in a dazed sort of way.

By this time there were twenty-five or thirty people in the room and the number was being increased rapidly.

All were anxious to see the "fun."

Billy Buck rose slowly to his feet.

He had been in a number of fights in his time, but he had never encountered such an adversary before in his life.

In all his fights put together he had hardly received as much punishment as he had already got in these few moments.

Never had he encountered a man who could hit with the force of this stranger.

The bully was a fat, overgrown brute, and in about the worst possible condition for a contest of this kind, so that he keenly felt the punishment which he had received.

After getting on his feet he looked at the New Yorker and from the expression on his face it was plain that he had got about all the fighting that he cared for.

It was a mystery to him though how it was that his antagonist had been able to punish him so dreadfully, for he had made the mistake common to ignorant men of his class, of thinking that because a man wore good clothes and had the appearance of a gentleman he could not do much in a fisticuff match.

In the crowd was one of the great American jokers who are always to be found in an assemblage of this kind.

And after the big fellow got on his feet, panting and blowing, the wag yelled out in a stentorian voice:

"Time!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW SCHEME.

A LOOK of rage appeared on the face of Billy Buck, and the crowd, ever ready to appreciate a joke, laughed loudly.

"W'ot are you a haw-hawing at like a lot of blamed mules?" exclaimed the bully, indignantly.

Then the crowd laughed again.

"Mebbe you galoots think thar is some fun about this business, but I kin tell you right now that thar ain't!"

This caused the crowd to fairly roar with laughter and Billy Buck, in supreme disgust called out:

"Ah, go hang yourselves! You are all a lot of donkeys, anyway!"

This caused the bystanders to laugh still more, but the bully had come to the conclusion that it wasn't any use for him to take any notice of them.

"Say, I reckon that you are one of the

fellers w'ot they call a pugilist?" Buck remarked, surveying the New Yorker with a curious eye.

"No, I am not exactly a pugilist, although I do happen to know a thing or two about boxing," De Berry replied.

"Wal, I reckon you do, for I never run up ag'in' a feller who kin handle himself as you kin in all my born days."

"I hav'n't commenced to show you the tricks which I know in that line," the New Yorker remarked in a quiet way and without any appearance of boasting.

"You hav'n't, eh?" the bully exclaimed with an appearance of great wonder.

"No, but if you will only stand up for three or four more rounds I will be able to show you a few points."

"Say, w'ot you take me for?" Billy Buck exclaimed, and the look which appeared on his face made the bystanders laugh again.

"Do you think that I am a hog on two legs? Don't you think I know when I get enough? Mebbe I don't but I think I do."

"Oh, are you satisfied?" De Berry asked, really surprised, for he had not anticipated that the other would be anxious to stop after one round.

"You kin bet your life I am!" Billy Buck replied in a most decided way.

"I have met some good men in my time, but I never run up ag'in' a galoot who kin hit as hard as you kin since I was hatched."

"I was a big fool to tackle you but I am not donkey enough to keep on now that I know what kind of a critter you ar'."

"You are the boss and I am satisfied. I made a big mistake, and that is all there is to it. So-long!"

And then with a parting glance of defiance at the laughing crowd Billy Buck took his departure.

Many were the congratulations extended to De Berry and innumerable were the invitations to drink which he received, for every man about in the crowd wanted to stand treat.

"Well, gentlemen, I cannot drink with each one of you, so I will compromise the matter by taking a single drink with the entire party," the New Yorker remarked.

Then after this ceremony was performed the friends departed.

"This was an extremely strange circumstance," Wolfe remarked as the pair proceeded toward the home of the young lawyer.

"This Billy Buck is one of the black sheep of the neighborhood, and when he gets a little liquor on board he is inclined to be quarrelsome, but he was not drunk to-night, and the deliberate way in which he pitched onto you leads me to suspect that some one put him up to it."

"Oh, yes, I do not think there is a doubt about the matter."

"I had that opinion from the beginning, for the fellow acted in such a deliberate manner that it seemed to be certain that some one had employed him to pick a quarrel with me."

"Of course there can be no doubt as to who the party is."

"Not the slightest!" De Berry exclaimed.

"It is to Mr. Alexander Tourjay that I am indebted for these little favors. He is determined to drive me from the town, and having failed in his personal effort is now resorting to the use of hired ruffians."

"You will have to keep your eyes open for this Black Jake," Wolfe warned.

"He is a treacherous, skulking villain, and it will be his game to take you unawares so as not to give you a chance for your life."

"As it happens, Tourjay is held in high respect by all these petty rascals, for whenever any of them got in trouble he has always done his best to get them out."

"Of course, it is the duty of a lawyer to do the best he can for his clients, but somehow, these fellows always seemed to run to Tourjay in preference to any other lawyer."

"The old saying about birds of a feather flocking together fits the case, I think," De Berry rejoined.

"There is no doubt in my mind that he thinks my absence from this locality is desirable, and as he failed to remove me himself he is setting his dogs on me."

"Well, the first dog certainly made a terrible failure."

"Yes, the tool did not succeed any better

than the master, and if this Black Jake is rash enough to attempt an attack on my life I shall do my best to put the scoundrel in such a condition that he will not be likely to trouble anybody else," and from the way in which the New Yorker spoke it was apparent that he was thoroughly in earnest.

De Berry realized that he was engaged in a game where the slightest mistake on his part would be apt to cost him his life, and so he proceeded with the utmost caution.

And the New Yorker planned his movements so well that Black Jake was not able to get a chance to shoot him, although the squatter tried to dog the footsteps of the stranger with the craft and patience of an Indian.

As De Berry was on his guard, and careful not to venture abroad after nightfall, after three days of spying Black Jake came to the conclusion that he had undertaken a most difficult task.

In the beginning he had imagined that it would be an extremely simple matter for him to assassinate the stranger.

All he would have to do was to lie in wait in some convenient spot near Wolfe's house after darkness set in, and then shoot the New Yorker as he passed, taking advantage of the cover afforded by the night to make his escape.

Black Jake was a cunning rascal, and he wanted to arrange the matter so that he could kill the stranger without risk of the crime being traced to him.

Thanks to the precautions adopted by De Berry it was not possible for him to get a chance at the stranger.

Four nights he hung around the Wolfe cottage without securing the desired opportunity, and then, disgusted by his want of success, he fell to planning a new scheme.

As we have said, the rascal was a cunning fellow enough, and it was not long before he hit upon a plan.

It was an extremely simple one, but to his thinking the odds were great that it would be a success.

Two points must be covered.

The stranger must be killed and the man who did the deed must escape without his identity being revealed.

And this was the scheme that the squatter hatched.

He would black his face, so as disguise himself as a negro, put on a worn and tattered suit of clothes, pull an old hat well down over his ears, and thus attired present himself at the Wolfe cottage with a letter in his left hand—inquire for "de gemmen from de North," being brought up with the negroes Black Jake could speak the African dialect to perfection, and state that he had a letter which he had been instructed to give right into his hands.

Then when De Berry advanced to take the letter he, with a keen-edged knife, which he held concealed in his right hand, would stab the stranger to the heart.

Then when the deed was done he would turn and run for his life, and as he was particularly swift of foot he did not doubt that, favored by the darkness, he would not have any difficulty in making his escape.

Black Jake chuckled gleefully after he hatched this scheme.

To his thinking there was not a doubt but what he would be successful and he was anxious for the night to come so he could put it into operation.

And when the shades of the evening tide covered in the earth, Black Jake saw to his delight that the night was an extremely dark one.

"It is mighty good!" he declared, communing with himself.

"If I kin succeed in getting 'round the corner of that ar' house it is awful big odds that no one will be able to trap me in the darkness, and that ar' Wolfe ain't of no account as a runner, anyway!"

Full of confidence then was the man when he marched up to the door of the Wolfe cottage with a letter clutched in one black hand while the other held his eight-inch bowie-knife pressed to his side.

The disguise of the man was perfect; he looked the low-down, shiftless negro to the life.

When he knocked at the door Wolfe came in answer.

The disguised ruffian made known his er-

rand, and Wolfe without a suspicion that anything was wrong summoned De Berry.

He, too, came without any apprehension of danger, but as the supposed negro explained what he wanted, the New Yorker happened to look into his eye.

De Berry was an expert swordsman, and it is a rule of fence always to watch for the signal for an attack in your opponent's eyes.

The New Yorker saw a warning sign in the orbs of the negro.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAPTURE.

"A LETTER for me?" asked De Berry and he extended his hand, playing his part so naturally that the disguised ruffian never had the slightest suspicion that he was suspected.

"Yes, sah, if you is de strange massa from de Norf."

"I am the man."

"Hyer is de letter, sah," and Black Jake stuck out his hand as he spoke.

Then, as De Berry made a movement to take the letter, with an extremely rapid motion Black Jake attempted to stab the New Yorker in the breast.

But, being warned by the malignant light which he had seen in the eyes of the other, De Berry was on his guard, and as the other struck at him he jumped back so that the blow fell short, and then as Black Jake pitched forward the New Yorker gave him a most terrible left-hander which caught the ruffian exactly on the point of the jaw, sending him reeling through the doorway into the yard where he went down all in a heap.

De Berry was quick to follow up the advantage which he had gained.

The shock of the fall had sent the knife spinning through the air so that the fellow was disarmed.

The powerful blow had half stunned the assassin but he had sense enough upon being deprived of his knife to endeavor to get out his revolver which he wore belted to his waist.

But the New Yorker was upon him before he could get the weapon out ready for action.

With a well-directed kick De Berry forced the weapon from his hand, and then as Black Jake endeavored to rise the New Yorker drew his revolver, and grasping it by the muzzle, using the weapon as a club, dealt the ruffian a terrific blow on the head which caused Black Jake to see more stars than he had ever beheld in the heavens.

The ruffian was struggling to his feet when he received the blow, and the stroke knocked him senseless to the earth.

By this time Wolfe had come to the New Yorker's assistance.

"You have knocked him out!" the young lawyer exclaimed.

"Yes, he will not be apt to be able to do much for a few minutes, and I think we had better improve the opportunity to secure the fellow so that he will not be able to continue the fight."

"That is a good idea," Wolfe assented.

"There is a clothesline in the yard and it will only take a few moments for us to truss this fellow up so that he will be powerless to do any harm."

Then Wolfe whipped out his knife and hurrying to the poles, where the line was stretched, cut off a dozen feet or so of it.

The pair soon had the unconscious ruffian bound hand and foot so that he was as helpless as a baby.

"Now let us carry him into the house, and put the scoundrel through a cross-examination," the New Yorker suggested.

"Yes, that is a good idea."

"The rascal attempted to murder me and as the man is a perfect stranger I have a curiosity to know why he should try to commit such a crime."

The two carried the unconscious ruffian into the parlor and there placed him upon the lounge.

The rays of the large lamp, burning upon the center table, fell upon him and at once the two friends made the discovery that the supposed negro was a white man in disguise.

They were astonished at this revelation.

"Oho! this is evidently much more of a plot than I supposed!" Wolfe declared.

"Yes, so it seems, but do you know the man?" De Berry asked.

The young lawyer approached close to the captive and surveyed him with a searching glance.

By this time consciousness was beginning to return to the ruffian, and he gradually rose to a sitting position.

Soon it became apparent to him that he was a prisoner and he scowled at the two friends.

Wolfe removed his hat, an operation which caused the ruffian to scowl worse than before.

"I thought I recognized him!" Wolfe exclaimed. "Although the disguise which he has assumed has greatly changed his appearance."

"Well, Black Jake, you have got yourself into a rather bad hole, I fancy!" the lawyer declared.

De Berry was not surprised at the revelation for he had suspected from the beginning that it was the ruffian whom he had been warned against.

"And this is Black Jake, eh?" the New Yorker remarked, looking at the fellow with a critical eye.

"That is what he is called," the lawyer answered, finding that the ruffian was not inclined to speak.

"I don't know that I have ever enjoyed the honor of making your acquaintance," De Berry observed with a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

"And therefore I am somewhat surprised that you should make this attempt upon my life."

Black Jake did not reply. All he did was to glare in a sullen way at the New Yorker.

"There was a motive for it, of course," De Berry went on.

"A man of your stamp does not undertake to commit a crime of this kind without a strong motive."

"There could not be anything personal in the matter for we have never met until now, so I cannot come to any other conclusion but that some one hired you to kill me."

The ruffian half-closed his eyes and appeared to be meditating about the matter, then, in an abrupt way, he exclaimed:

"You are a blamed Yankee, and I hate Yankees!"

"Do you hate them badly enough to attempt to kill any one of them whom you may encounter?" De Berry asked.

"Yes, I do!" the squatter replied, doggedly.

"Oh, come now, Jake, that story is entirely too thin!" the lawyer declared.

"We cannot swallow that at all!"

"It is the truth! dog-gone me if it tain't!" the ruffian protested.

"No, no!" Wolfe declared. "You know better than that, and it isn't of any use for you to attempt to fool us with a game of that kind, for we know that it isn't the truth."

"There has been a hundred Yankees, as you call them, in this town during the last year alone, and you never tried to quarrel with any of them."

"In fact, you have picked up many an honest dollar by acting as guide to parties of them who have gone on hunting excursions up the river."

"You might as well come out with the truth, for a falsehood will not do you any good," the New Yorker remarked.

"I know that you have been set on to attack me by some one, and I have a good, strong suspicion as to who that some one is, too."

"Oh, yes, I reckon that you know a heap!" the prisoner exclaimed in an insolent way.

"There are some things that I know, and this is one of them," De Berry replied.

"Now, then, you are in a pretty bad way. You have attempted to commit a murder, and have been captured, red-handed, in the very act; if I proceed against you it will be apt to cost you dearly, but as I haven't been harmed, I am inclined to let up a little on you, provided that you make a confession as to who set you on to attack me."

Black Jake laughed in the faces of his captors.

"You are jest wasting your breath; mister," he exclaimed. "In the first place, nobody set me on, and if anybody did, I ain't

the kind of man to go back on a feller wot trusted me, no, sir; you kin bet all that you are worth on that ar' thing!"

"You refuse, then, to give me any information?" De Berry asked.

"Yes, sir-ee, that is my platform!" the ruffian retorted with an air of dogged defiance.

"Well, then, I shall have to let the law take its course," De Berry declared.

"I ain't skeered!" Black Jake exclaimed, in his sullen, insolent way.

"I reckon that as you ain't damaged, it ain't a hanging matter no how you kin fix it."

"That is true enough," the lawyer observed. "You cannot be hung for an attempted murder, but the chances are good that you will be sent to jail for a long term, and I don't believe that you will enjoy yourself much in prison."

"Don't you make any mistake about this hyer thing!" Black Jake exclaimed.

"You ain't got me in no prison yet, and, mebbe, you will not be able to work the trick so mighty smart arter all, 'cos thar's many a slip between the cup and the lip, you know," and the ruffian laughed sarcastically at his captors.

"Yes, there is no doubt that the saying is a true one, but we have got you in such a tight place that it will be almost impossible for you to escape punishment, although I suppose that you have got some influential man at your back upon whose aid you rely."

"I ain't a-blowing 'bout having no friends at my back," he responded slowly.

"I reckon I kin raise a few dollars though for to pay a lawyer, and if I git a good one I don't see why he can't pull me out of this hyer hole."

"I fancy that you are in so deep this time that the best lawyer in the world will not be able to do you much good," Wolfe responded.

"Oh, yes, of course you would say that, but I ain't going by your say-so, you know," the ruffian retorted.

"You will find out that I am telling you the truth," Wolfe replied.

"But it does not make any difference to me, you know. In fact, as far as I am concerned, it is my opinion that this neighborhood would be decidedly benefited if you were locked up for eight or ten years."

The ruffian glared at the young lawyer for a moment and then he cried in a voice full of rage:

"Darn my skin! if I don't get squar' with you for this one of these days!"

"Perhaps you will and perhaps you will not, but I can tell you, right now, that if you attempt to attack me, I will shoot you down with as little mercy as I would show to a mad dog."

Then Wolfe, leaving the New Yorker to guard the prisoner, went in search of the village constable, and in another half-hour Black-Jake was imprisoned in the calaboose, much to his rage and disgust.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BOLD ROBBERY.

AFTER seeing the ruffian safely locked up the two friends returned to the house of Wolfe and there held a conference in regard to the matter.

"The fellow was set on to attack you, of course," Wolfe remarked.

"Yes, and as there is only one man in this neighborhood who has reason to bear me any ill-will, it is not a difficult matter to guess who it was that planned the job."

"You are correct in that statement; Alex Tourjay was the man undoubtedly; but, as I fancy, it will not be an easy matter to bring the crime home to him."

"It will not be possible unless Black Jake confesses, and from the way the fellow talks it is evident that he is not inclined to do anything of the kind, and then too it is probable that Tourjay, who is a remarkably sharp and shrewd fellow, has so arranged the matter that it is not possible for Black Jake to betray him even if he wanted to do so."

"It is more than probable that such is the case. An able and unscrupulous man like Tourjay would not have any difficulty in arranging the matter in such a way. I am morally certain though that he is the man who hired the ruffian to murder me."

"Tourjay will undoubtedly defend him,"

the lawyer observed, thoughtfully. "But that does not prove anything though, for as he has acted as his counsel half-a-dozen times when Black Jake has got into difficulties, it is the most natural thing in the world for the fellow to appeal to Tourjay, after getting into this scrape, for aid to escape the consequences."

"Well, the plot to murder me has failed, so that is one satisfaction," the New Yorker observed.

"And if I am careful to keep on my guard the chances are great that I shall be able to take care of myself."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

The affair turned out just as the two friends expected.

In the morning Black Jake sent a message to Alexander Tourjay and he came at once to the jail. The jailer had a high respect for the lawyer and so he admitted him at once to the cell where the prisoner was confined.

"What is this scrape that you have got into now?" Tourjay asked as he took a seat upon the only stool that the cell boasted, while Black Jake sat on the bed, the only other piece of furniture in the apartment.

Tourjay spoke so that the jailer who was returning to the outer apartment could overhear his words.

The idea of this was to convey to the jailer the impression that he, Tourjay, knew nothing whatever about the matter.

Black Jake was quick to take the cue. The squatter was a cunning fellow in his way and during the night he had concocted a story to explain why he had taken it into his head to attack the stranger.

It was quite a plausible tale too.

He had come to town to dispose of some fish and game which he had caught, and after getting the money for the articles had gone on a spree.

After getting full of liquor he had heard mention made of a strange Yankee who was stopping with Lawyer Wolfe, and as he hated Yankees the idea came to him that it would be a good thing for him to go and give the stranger a good hiding.

And in order to render the indignity still more humiliating he resolved to disguise himself as a negro, so that after the New Yorker had been soundly thrashed he would be under the impression that his assailant was a colored man.

"That is a very good story, Jake," the lawyer remarked with an approving nod.

"And as the New Yorker was lucky enough to escape without being damaged, it is not likely that your punishment will be a severe one even if I don't succeed in getting you off scot free."

"Do the best you can for me, and if you kin get me off with a light sentence I will take another hack at this durned Yankee, for I have got it in for him."

"He cracked me over the head with the butt of a revolver jest as if I was a blamed hog!" Black Jake continued, angrily.

"That was mighty rough treatment and I do not wonder that you are anxious to get square with the man."

"I will never be satisfied until I have laid him out!" Black Jake exclaimed, and he doubled up his fist, shaking it at the empty air as he spoke.

"The next time you must be careful to fix the thing so that he will not be able to get the best of it."

"Oh, yes, you kin bet your life I will!"

Then Tourjay departed.

From the jail Tourjay went to the hotel and there encountered the Englishman, Fitzherbert, who had taken up his quarters in Sulphurville.

The Englishman immediately invited the lawyer to take a drink with him, saying that he hated to drink alone.

Tourjay accepted the invitation, and when the liquor was served the Englishman pulled out a roll of bills so large that the lawyer's surprise was at once excited.

"You will excuse me for speaking about it, but don't you think that it is rather risky for you to carry around so much money and allow people to know the fact?" Tourjay asked.

"Oh, I am not at all afraid of anybody troubling me," the other replied.

"I have always carried a good deal of money, and never yet was robbed."

"You certainly have been fortunate then," Tourjay remarked.

"At present I presume I am carrying a little more than I ought to do, but that is because I am looking for a plantation, and it was my idea to have the money all ready so as to be able to pay a good slice to bind the bargain as soon as I found a place to suit me."

"Yes, I comprehend, but I think you are rather imprudent, although it must be said that there are not many bad characters in the neighborhood."

"Well, really, I have not got so much money, you know," the Englishman declared, in a reflective way.

"Only about three thousand dollars, you know."

"That would be considerable money to lose," Tourjay urged.

"Oh, yes, but, my dear fellow, I do not think there is the least danger of my losing it."

This ended the conversation.

The Englishman had secured the best room in the hotel, an apartment on the second floor, and he really seemed to take a delight in telling people how much money he had, and by the time he had been in Sulphurville a week the inhabitants had come to the conclusion that the bold Briton was a millionaire.

About eleven o'clock on the night of the day when Tourjay had deemed it wise to warn the Englishman against displaying his money so openly, Fitzherbert bade the gentlemen adieu with whom he had been conversing in the hotel office and taking one of the candles, which were provided for the use of guests, proceeded up stairs.

The entries were illuminated by small coal-oil lamps; and on this particular night they gave so dim a light that it was as much as the Englishman could do to find his way.

"They are about burned out, I suppose; the party who ought to attend to them has probably neglected to do so," the Englishman murmured, as he ascended the stairs.

At the head of the flight he turned to the left and proceeded about a dozen steps along the corridor to his apartment.

Fitzherbert never took the trouble to lock the door excepting when he retired to rest, so on this occasion he entered at once.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold, though, when he received a blow upon the head which felled him to the floor as though he had been shot.

The blow was such a violent one that the Englishman was knocked senseless.

The assailant had been concealed behind the open door.

As soon as the Englishman was prostrate the man who had struck the blow immediately proceeded to rob Fitzherbert of the roll of bills which the Briton had displayed so openly.

It only took a moment for the unknown to do this and then he hastened from the apartment.

There was a stairway at the end of the hall which led down to the rear of the building, and there a door gave access to the yard.

Down this stairway the robber hurried, passed through the door to the open air, and soon vanished in the gloom.

Within five minutes consciousness returned to Fitzherbert and he struggled to his feet.

"Hang me!" the Englishman cried in deep disgust. "The fellow has done the trick and beaten me at my own game!"

Then Fitzherbert hurried down stairs.

The landlord with some of his cronies were just taking a parting drink as a "night-cap" when Fitzherbert came rushing into the room.

"I have been robbed!" the Englishman cried.

Great was the amazement of the hearers when Fitzherbert told his story.

Up the stairs they all hurried.

Of course they could not find any trace of the robber.

The landlord was sure that the man had not come down the front way for he had been so as to command a view of the stairs for the last half an hour.

Then the discovery was made that the rear door was unbolted, and as the landlord

always bolted the door himself at ten o'clock it was evident that the robber had escaped in that way.

"We will raise a hue and cry in the morning and I reckon we will be able to git hold of the fellow if we git a good ready on!" the landlord declared.

"Yes, yes!" cried the others in a sort to chorus.

The Englishman nodded assent, but there was a look on his face which plainly showed that he felt a little dubious about the matter.

"I will put the thing right in the hands of the sheriff as soon as I kin scare him up in the morning and you kin jest bet your boots that Bill Todhunter won't be long in putting salt on the tail of this bird!" the landlord exclaimed.

"Well, I sincerely hope the sheriff will be able to do something, for it is no joke to be robbed in this way," Fitzherbert remarked ruefully.

"Bill kin if any man kin, you bet!" the landlord asserted.

And now leaving the hotel we will follow in the footsteps of the robber.

He was a man about the medium size, dressed in a common dark suit, such as was worn by the average man in Sulphurville.

"Wore a dark slouch hat, pulled down over his eyes, and all the lower part of his face was covered by a bushy black beard."

After leaving the hotel, the unknown proceeded to the outskirts of the town.

The hour was so late that no one was abroad and the man did not encounter a soul.

Ten minutes after leaving the hotel the unknown came to an old shed, and by this time the moon had come out from behind the clouds so there was ample light.

The man entered the shed, sat down on a box and proceeded to examine the prize which he had captured.

Great was his disgust when he discovered that the roll was a dummy one.

There was about fifty dollars in good money, the rest merely advertising bills, waste paper in reality.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UP-RIVER MAN.

WHEN the people of Sulphurville heard the particulars of the robbery which had taken place they were vastly astonished, and it was the general topic of conversation.

The inhabitants were all of one mind in regard to the party who had committed the deed.

There was no doubt in their minds that it was the same man who had relieved Colonel Jefferson Garrison of his wealth.

But when it came to the question of who the man was, the wisest gossips of the town were puzzled.

After the robbery of the colonel, there had been a dozen or so who felt confident that the squatter Black Jake was the man who had done the job.

But Black Jake could not be charged with this crime, for he was safely locked up in the jail.

So all the people who were disposed to pick Black Jake out as a scape-grace were greatly puzzled.

The Englishman kicked up a fearful row about the matter.

"It is a blooming, beastly shame, you know, for a fellow to be robbed of so large a sum," he declared.

"For a man to lose three thousand dollars is no joke, but I am so deeply annoyed about the matter, that I am willing to offer a big reward for the apprehension of the robber."

In this emergency about everybody consulted the New Orleans detective, Mr. Nicodemus Tomlinson.

He was a man-hunter; it was his business to catch rascals of this kind, and he ought to be able to give good advice.

Mr. Tomlinson looked wise, then came the old detective's game of saying that he had a clue, and if the people would only be patient there wasn't any doubt in his mind that in a very few days he would be able to lay the rascal by the heels.

This statement was satisfactory to the majority of the people, but there were some few doubting Thomases who had heard this sort of ghost story, as they termed it, before, and they were not disposed to attach much importance to the statement.

The sheriff hastily summoned volunteers and rode up and down the country for a couple of days, taking particular care to hunt up all the black sheep who dwelt in the neighborhood and putting them through a severe cross-examination.

Not a trace, though, could be gained of the bold fellow who had so skillfully robbed the Englishman.

So at last the sheriff was compelled to admit that it was likely that this robber would evade discovery just like the one who had stolen Colonel Garrison's money.

The Englishman was very much disappointed.

"It is not the loss of the money so much," he declared, "as the idea of being robbed in such a beastly fashion. And the worst of the matter is, you know, that I was stupid enough to neglect to take the number of the notes, so I am not able to give the officers a clue by means of which the money could be traced."

"If I had the numbers, don't you know, it might be possible to nab the fellow when he attempts to pay out the money."

All agreed that it was very unfortunate that Mr. Fitzherbert had neglected this common precaution.

The excitement which had been caused by the robbery was a good thing for the hotel bar-room, for as it was the general loafing-place of the town, almost every man in the place considered that it was necessary for him to drop into the bar-room three or four times a day, in order to learn if there was any news.

So it followed that there was a knot of people congregated in and around the bar-room from early morning until late at night.

The news of the bold robbery had spread with wonderful rapidity, and so a large number of men living within ten or fifteen miles of Sulphurville had ridden into town, anxious for news.

Wolfe took a great interest in the matter, so he and the New Yorker were in the group which had gathered in the hotel bar-room on the afternoon of the next day after the one on which the robbery had occurred.

The lawyer was a remarkably keen fellow and he had arrived at a conclusion in regard to the matter.

"I think the sheriff and all the rest of them are barking up the wrong tree," he remarked to De Berry.

"Todhunter, and his posse, are riding up and down the country, cross-examining every fellow who has the misfortune to bear a bad reputation, thinking in that way to get a clue to the robber, but, as I said, I think they are on the wrong track altogether."

"You do not believe that this robbery was committed by any low common scoundrel?" the New Yorker asked.

"No, it is my opinion that a high-grade rascal did the job."

"It was certainly a skillful piece of work, and from the way in which it was done I should judge that the man had not only courage but brains as well."

"No doubt about that, and none of the common scoundrels would be able to plan and carry out such a game."

"It is my opinion that the man who committed these crimes amounts to something," Wolfe declared.

"And it is also my impression too that all these robberies which have startled this neighborhood during the past year have been the work of a single man."

"Well, they certainly seem to have been carried out in about the same way," De Berry observed, thoughtfully.

"Yes, the ear-marks are the same, and I am decidedly of the opinion that the crimes have been committed by some man whose position places him above the reach of suspicion."

"I should not be surprised if you are correct about this matter," the New Yorker assented.

"Will you tell the sheriff what you think about the affair?" De Berry asked.

"Well, I don't really know whether it will be worth while for me to do it or not."

"Todhunter is a bull-headed sort of a fellow and is not overburdened with brains."

"He is one of the kind of men who thinks that he knows it all, and is apt to come to the conclusion when any advice is tendered to

him that it is a sort of imputation upon his own wisdom."

"I comprehend," De Berry observed. "A man of that sort does not take kindly to advice no matter how good it may be."

"Exactly, and therefore I do not think that it will be of any use to tell Todhunter of my suspicions for it is very evident that he hasn't made up his mind that some one of these mean low-down hog-stealing rascals is the fellow who did the job, and if I should suggest to him that the robber is in all probability right in the town here, under our noses, he would undoubtedly laugh at the suggestion."

"Yes, it is not an easy matter to a fellow of this sort, wise in his own conceit," the New Yorker observed.

"That is the idea."

The conversation was at this point interrupted by the entrance of a big, gaunt man, dressed after the fashion of the small planter in coarse clothes, who came striding into the saloon in such a boisterous way as to attract the attention of every one in the place.

"Howdy, boys!" the new-comer exclaimed after he got into the apartment, came to a halt and favored the crowd with a bow.

"These hyer ar' red hot times, I reckon, and if they ain't I don't want a cent."

"You hear me, I reckon? This hyer is my horn w'ot is a-blowing, and I want you all to understand that I am a gay gazelle from the upper Red River."

"I am a snorter, I am, and when I git a-going all creation wants fer to keep their eyes on me and for to give me plenty of room, you bet yer life."

"I am old Nick Muggins, hard and tough as nails and jest the man to tie to a skirmish!"

It was apparent that the man had been drinking freely and the liquor had loosened his tongue.

"It is big Nick Muggins an up-river planter," Wolfe explained to the New Yorker.

"His place is about ten miles up the stream, and he is noted for being quarrelsome and ugly when he gets a certain quantity of liquor on board."

"Is he particularly dangerous?" De Berry inquired in a rather sarcastic way.

"Well, he is a tolerably good rough-and-tumble fighter, or, to speak correctly, he used to be a few years ago, and he has always prided himself upon his abilities in this line."

"I have not heard though of his having had any trouble for two or three years, and I thought the man had got over the inclination to come in and clean out the town which he had every once in a while."

"Such fellows are terrible nuisances to my thinking," the New Yorker observed.

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUARRELSOME FELLOW.

THE big fellow walked up to the bar and brought his clinched fist down upon it with a vigorous bang.

"I want you to understand, feller-citizens, that this hyer business w'ot has been going on has got to stop, and you kin jest bet your life on it too!" he exclaimed.

"What are you talking about, Nick?" the landlord inquired.

"I mean these hyer robberies, and don't you forget it!" Muggins replied.

"It is a dog-gone shame—that is w'ot it is, you bet your life!"

"W'ot is this hyer country coming to anyway?"

And as he put the question the big fellow wheeled around and faced the crowd in the saloon, resting his elbows on the bar.

"I tell you w'ot it is, feller-citizens, this hyer deal was as rough a one as I ever heered tell in all my born days, and the men of this hyer town don't amount to shucks if they don't turn out and hunt the robber galoot down."

"Wa-al, I reckon that the sheriff is doing his level best on the job," the landlord observed, coming around to the end of the counter so as to be able to take part in the conversation.

"It is a mighty tough game that Todhunter has got to play, for you must bear in mind that the galoot, who got away with the money, didn't leave no clue behind him for

to show who he was or which way he had gone," the host continued.

"Yes, yes, that is so," assented half a dozen of the crowd.

"I reckon I could put the sheriff onto the right track, and I wouldn't have to try very blamed hard either!" Muggins announced with a series of mysterious winks.

Every one in the apartment was astonished by this declaration, and so all eyes were turned inquiringly upon the up-river man.

"Yes, sir-ee, you kin bet your life that I could give the sheriff some points in this hyer game!" Muggins exclaimed, shaking his head in a knowing way.

"I reckon that you are jest the man that Todhunter would like to git hold on!" the landlord asserted.

"'Cos I know that the sheriff is doing his level best to pick up points, and, so far, he ain't been able to strike nary one."

"I kin put him on the right track, you bet your life!" the planter declared, in an arrogant way.

"Todhunter will be mighty glad to see you if you can do anything of the kind!" the landlord replied, and it was evident both from the way in which he spoke, and the expression upon his face that he had a great deal of doubt in regard to the planter's ability to throw any light on the matter.

"The thing is jest hyer, it seems to me," Muggins remarked.

"When a robbery of this kind takes place I should go in to spot all the suspicious characters that thar was 'bout town, particularly strangers whom thar don't anybody know anything about."

And as the man spoke he looked at the New Yorker in such a peculiar way that it was plainly evident to all in the saloon that his words were directed to De Berry.

For a moment the New Yorker looked at the planter in profound amazement, and then, his face flushing, he said:

"Do you intend that remark to apply to me, sir?"

"Waal, I reckon that if the shoe fits you, you had better wear it!" the big fellow retorted in the most insolent manner possible.

"But this is such utter nonsense!" Wolfe exclaimed, unable to remain silent.

"Mr. De Berry is a gentleman and my friend; I know all about him and at the time the robbery was committed we, in company with my mother, and one of our neighbors, were playing whist, so it is a clear impossibility for him to have had any thing to do with this crime."

"Waal, I don't have no good opinion of Yankees, anyhow!" Muggins exclaimed doggedly.

"This man means to quarrel with me!" De Berry whispered rapidly in Wolfe's ear.

"It certainly looks like it," the young lawyer replied in the same guarded way.

"I might as well take the bull by the horns and have it out with the fellow first as last," the New Yorker whispered to Wolfe.

Then stepping forward he said:

"I am not in the habit of allowing anybody to insult me with impunity, and so in presence of these gentlemen I tell you to your teeth that if you dare to make the assertion that I know anything about this robbery you are uttering an infamous falsehood for which I shall hold you personally responsible!"

The silence in the saloon during the delivery of this speech was so intense that a pin could have been heard to drop.

Although De Berry was a stranger, yet the men of Sulphurville knew from the manner in which he had encountered Alexander Tourjay that he was a fighter, and as the up-river planter had considerable reputation as a warrior, there wasn't one within the saloon but what anticipated that there would be trouble when De Berry stepped forward and in so curt a manner proceeded to call the big fellow down.

The truth of the matter was that Muggins had come into the place looking for trouble, but for all that he was considerably astonished by the promptness with which the New Yorker stepped forward and confronted him.

Muggins was not a quick-witted man and he hesitated a moment before replying.

Before speaking he removed his arms from the counter and straightened up, just as

though he expected that the New Yorker would attack him without warning.

"Say, I reckon that is a kinder of a sassy speech which you have made to me, and I want you to understand mighty dog-goned quick that I ain't the kind of a yaller dog for to stand anything of that kind!" the planter declared, and then he doubled up his big fists and assumed a warlike attitude.

"You should be careful then not to give offense and so provoke retaliation," the New Yorker retorted immediately.

"I reckon that I have a right to say w'ot I think!" Muggins exclaimed, angrily.

"You have no right to asperse the character of another man and if you are unwise enough to do so you must not be astonished if you are speedily called to an account."

"Waal, durn me if you ain't the sassiest man that I have struck in a dog's age!" the planter declared, beginning to work himself up into a passion.

"Yes, you bet your life on that, and I have a dog-goned good mind to jest smash you two or three times so as to git a little sense inter your head!"

"As a rule I prefer not to dirty my hands with a fellow like yourself, going on the principle that a man cannot afford to stop and kick every cur that barks at him, but sometimes I am obliged to thrash a man of your stamp as that is the only way to teach you anything."

"W'ot! you thrash me?" the planter roared in a rage.

"Yes, that is what I say," the New Yorker replied, assuming a fighting position.

"Waal, waal, dog-gone your impudence!" Muggins exclaimed, very much enraged, and brandishing his arms in the air.

"You are the sassiest cuss that I have run across in a year."

"Don't you know that if I should sail in to you that in about two minutes I would smash you as flat as a pancake?"

"No, I don't know it, and what is more, I have serious doubts about your ability to perform an operation of that kind, for I do not think that I will have any difficulty in giving you a thrashing which you will be apt to remember for a goodly period of time."

"Dog-gone you, you miserable Yankee, I will eat you clean up!" Muggins declared, and then he made a rush at De Berry.

It was the planter's idea to bear down the other by his weight, and so he went at him after the fashion of a mad bull, hitting out in the most vigorous manner.

But as the New Yorker was a trained athlete and particularly skillful as a boxer, he did not have any difficulty in evading the clumsy attack of the big fellow.

De Berry slipped under the planter's arm, then turning quickly, grasped the man by the collar and the waistband of his pantaloons—he wore no coat—then ran him through the door of the saloon, and with a vigorous kick sent him headlong into the street, where the big fellow went down upon his face, sprawling like a huge frog.

There was a yell of laughter from the lookers-on, for this proceeding seemed to be extremely comic to them.

Muggins had been in a good many fights since he had grown to man's estate, but he had never been "handled" in this way before, so he rose slowly to his feet, covered with dust, and, turning, surveyed his adversary with amazement.

"That was a durned mean Yankee trick!" Muggins exclaimed angrily. "And you don't dar' for to come out hyer whar I kin git a fair crack at you. B'gosh! if I kin git any sort of a show at you at all I will break you in two."

"I am your man and I am ready to give you the best in the shop!" De Berry responded promptly.

Then he advanced and confronted the planter.

The big fellow had learned wisdom and he did not attempt to "rush" his opponent this time.

On the contrary he kept at arm's length and sparred in a clumsy way, endeavoring to secure an opening.

Of course when opposed to such a perfect master of the boxer's art as De Berry the planter stood no chance whatever.

The big fellow flourished his arms in the

air, exerting all his strength only to have his blows fall upon empty space.

Then tiring at last Muggins allowed his guard to drop.

De Berry improved the opportunity immediately and the planter received two blows one in the jaw and the other over the heart, which took all the fight out of him.

Down he went on the flat of his back, half stunned by the sledge-hammer-like strokes, while the bystanders yelled in delight, for this sort of thing just suited them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

STRIKING THE TRAIL.

MUGGINS remained motionless upon the ground for over a couple of minutes, and then thinking it was possible that he might be badly injured some of the spectators went to his aid.

"Oh, I am all right, boys, I ain't dead," the planter said in a husky voice as he rose to a sitting position.

I reckon though that my jaw and my ribs feel as though a mule had kicked me," and rueful indeed was the way in which he spoke.

The speech made the bystanders roar with laughter.

The planter had no friends in the crowd, for his ugly, quarrelsome disposition was well known.

Muggins was too much cut up by the defeat which he had sustained to resent the jeering laughter.

He rose slowly to his feet, and surveyed his opponent with a look of wonder.

"Darn my skin if you ain't the most deceiving man w'ot I ever met!" he declared with a solemn shake of the head.

"I have run up ag'in' a good many tough men in my time, but I never yet struck a galoot w'ot kin hit like you kin; you are a terror and no mistake, and the man w'ot said I would have an easy job in whaling the life out of you, didn't know w'ot he was a-talking about."

This speech aroused the New Yorker's suspicions at once.

"Did some one then suggest to you to attack me?" De Berry asked, quickly.

The planter saw at once that he had made a mistake in speaking so uncautiously, and as he was far from being a master of the art of dissimulation, the expression upon his face plainly betrayed the working of his mind.

"I didn't say nothing like that," he replied.

"Ah, yes, but your words implied as much, and as you went out of your way to pick a quarrel with me, it is evident that you must have had some motive for so doing," the New Yorker argued.

Muggins shifted uneasily from one leg to the other, and scratched his head in a vacant sort of way.

"Tain't so," he said. "I don't know nothing about you, anyway, and nobody put me up for to pick a fuss with you."

"All thar is about the thing is that I hate Yankees, and the notion come to me that, mebbe, you knew something 'bout this hyer robbery."

"This story is altogether too thin!" the New Yorker exclaimed, contemptuously.

"I know that is not the truth. You were set on to attack me, and I do not think it would trouble me much to speak the name of the man who contrived the affair."

"Oh, no, honest Injun; I wasn't set on to you by anybody; wish I may die if I was! But I can't stand talking hyer with you, 'cos I've got some business to attend to—so long!"

And then the big fellow sneaked off in a way which plainly showed that he was decidedly crestfallen by the defeat which he had sustained.

A dozen or so of the bystanders took it upon themselves to congratulate De Berry upon his victory, and they took pains to assure him that, although he was a stranger and from the North, yet a large majority of the people of the town had a high respect for him, and were prepared to do all in their power to make his stay in Sulphurville a pleasant and agreeable one.

De Berry thanked the gentlemen and then he and Wolfe strolled off in the direction of the young lawyer's house.

"This is an extremely odd affair," Wolfe commented. "And there isn't a doubt in my mind that the fellow was set on to attack you."

"It is true that he is a quarrelsome and an ugly customer when he gets a certain quantity of liquor on board, but he would never have gone so deliberately out of his way to pick a quarrel with you if some one had not made the arrangement with him to do so."

"No doubt about it at all, and it does not require the wisdom of a sage to decide who was the man who instigated the attack."

"Oh, Tourjay, of course, was at the bottom of it!" Wolfe declared immediately.

"He is the arch-conspirator—the head devil, so to speak, who contrived to get both Black Jake and this big bully to attack you."

"No doubt about the correctness of that," De Berry assented.

"Oh, yes, he is the man!"

"And now the question arises—how much longer is this sort of thing going to keep on? Am I to be exposed to attacks by every miserable ruffian whom this fellow can induce to assail me?"

"Well, really that is not an easy question to answer," the other replied, slowly.

"But I should say that as long as you remain in this neighborhood it is likely that Tourjay will not relax in his efforts to damage you."

"I have known the man ever since we were boys together and am well aware that he is both cruel and vindictive—one of the kind of men who would pursue an enemy to the very grave."

"The fellow is brave enough, mind you," Wolfe declared. "There is no doubt in regard to his courage; he has given ample proof that he is as fearless as a lion upon a dozen different occasions."

"Yes, that is the opinion which I formed of him."

"The wound which you inflicted upon him was a severe one, and until he recovers from it he will not be able to contend with you himself, and so he will have to hire men to attack you if he wishes to carry on the war."

"Well, it is not a pleasant prospect," De Berry observed, slowly. "But as I don't see how I can help myself very well I suppose I shall have to grin and bear it, as the saying goes."

"That certainly appears to be the situation at present, but I have an idea that you will not have much trouble until Tourjay recovers sufficiently to take the field against you in person."

"You see, the fact that you have succeeded in getting the best of both of the fellows who attacked you, and the victories were so easily achieved by you, will be apt to open the eyes of the natives in regard to your powers as a fighting man, and it is my idea that Tourjay will not find it an easy matter to get men willing to undertake the job of attacking you now that the town knows what you can do."

The New Yorker laughed.

"I never expected to win such a reputation," De Berry declared.

"But under the circumstances it is a very good thing for me that nature has been so kind to me as far as physical gifts go, and fortunate, too, that I was so situated as to be able to educate myself so as to be able to use my powers to the best advantage."

"You have undoubtedly made a good name as a warrior in this neighborhood and I shall be very much surprised indeed if Tourjay succeeds in finding any one to attack you."

By this time the pair had arrived at the house of the young lawyer, the conversation came to an end, and we will leave them.

Back to the hotel we transport the reader and introduce him to a foxy-faced, middle-aged gentleman, whose features plainly indicated that he was a Hebrew.

The name he inscribed on the hotel register was Solomon Vonderstein, and he gave his residence as New Orleans.

The smooth-faced, smiling detective, Nicodemus Tomlinson, was in the office when the stranger arrived, but no sign of recognition passed between the two.

After Mr. Vonderstein went up to his room, though, the detective carelessly sauntered out into the entry, and then as soon as

he could do so without attracting any attention went up-stairs and knocked at Mr. Vonderstein's door.

The old Jew admitted him and from the way in which they greeted each other it was plain that the two were old acquaintances.

"Did you fix the matter up all right?" the detective asked, helping himself to a chair without standing upon any ceremony.

"Oh, yesh, mine tear fr'end, I did not find any troubles in arranging der matter," and the old Jew rubbed his hands together and chuckled softly.

This proceeding had become as a second nature to him and he did it constantly.

"You want to push him for payment, you understand?"

"Oh, yesh."

"The mortgage is for five thousand and is overdue. You got hold of it in a trade, without knowing much about the circumstances of the case, but you had an idea that everything was all right."

"Yesh, yesh!"

"Unexpectedly you find that you have got to have some money. You don't want to be hard, but some cash you must have, two or three thousand dollars, anyway, and then the rest can remain."

"I comprehend, my tear fr'end, und I will work the game to the queen's taste."

"Then, as soon as you get to the hotel, after collecting the money, tell the landlord that you want to put the cash in the safe, inform him where you got it from, and, as a matter of precaution take the number of the bills, explaining to him that you always do that, so in case a robbery is committed the bills can be traced."

"Do not fear! I will carry out der instructions to der letter!"

"All right! go it then, and if the game is well played I do not think there is a doubt but what we will trap our bird."

Then the two departed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLOT.

ALEXANDER TOURJAY had a law office in Sulphurville situated over the principal general store of the town on the next block to the one where the hotel was located.

The lawyer sat in his easy-chair, poring over a law book, when Major Kaufman entered.

The major made his appearance at just about the same time that the Hebrew stranger was registering his name at the hotel.

"Well, how goes everything?" the old sport asked as he helped himself to a chair.

"I am sorry to say that things are not panning out as they ought to do," Tourjay replied with a frown, as he closed up the book and threw it upon the table.

"I haven't had a law case with any big money in it for a year, nothing but little petty affairs which have not amounted to anything."

"Then, too, this morning, I got a bit of bad news by letter. I have a first mortgage on my place for five thousand dollars. It was held by a party in New Orleans, and although it was overdue, I have not troubled myself about it, being under the impression that as long as I wasn't too slow about paying the interest I need not trouble myself about the principal."

"That is usually the case."

"Yes, but in this morning's mail I received a letter from the party who holds the mortgage, notifying me that he had sold the same to one Solomon Vonderstein."

The veteran sport shook his head.

"That sounds like a Jew name," he said.

"And, as a rule, these Hebrew gentlemen are hard customers to do business with."

"Yes, I am afraid I am going to have trouble, for at present it is not possible for me to raise the money, if the new man wants the whole amount at once. If he will be satisfied, though, to take a thousand or two on account and allow the balance to run I can arrange the matter in that way."

"Well, I should not be surprised if you could make an agreement of that sort with him."

"I shall wait until I hear from the man and then, if he presses me for payment make the proposition."

"How does your love affair with Miss Whaley go on?"

The lawyer shook his head and an angry look appeared upon his face.

"I am afraid, to use the old saying, that my cake is all dough in that quarter," Tourjay declared.

"I am informed that she did not hesitate to express the opinion that I acted like a bully and a ruffian in picking a quarrel with this stranger from the North and she was glad that I got the worst of the encounter."

"Well, if she did say anything of that sort it is evident that you do not stand a chance to win her," the old sport remarked in a thoughtful way.

"Oh, I do not think there is a doubt but what she did make the remark, for the information came from a party whom I feel sure I can trust."

"Well, I am very sorry that there isn't any hope for you in that quarter for the girl would have been a rich prize, and if you could have got her it would have put you on your legs again."

"Yes, it is a pity," Tourjay assented. "And I don't mind admitting to you that the upsetting of this project is a terrible blow to me, for I relied upon the marriage to retrieve my broken fortunes."

"It is deuced unlucky and no mistake!" the major exclaimed.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Solomon Vonderstein.

The old Jew was all smiles and politeness as he introduced himself, but for all that he speedily came down to business.

He was sorry to be obliged to press for payment, for it had been his intention to hold the mortgage as an investment, but, unexpectedly, he needed money and so was forced to ask for a settlement.

And from the way in which the old Jew spoke one would have supposed that he was the debtor instead of the creditor, so soft and smooth was he.

Then Tourjay explained that the demand took him completely by surprise, being entirely unexpected, but he happened to have on hand a couple of thousand dollars, so if he—Mr. Vonderstein—would be satisfied to accept that at present and give him a little time on the balance he would be much obliged.

The Hebrew gentleman immediately replied that he would be glad to arrange the matter in that way.

So Tourjay went to his safe, got out the money and paid it over to the Jew, who gave a receipt and then departed apparently being perfectly satisfied with the arrangement.

The old sport waited until the door closed behind the Hebrew gentleman, then he shook his head and with a grave expression upon his face remarked:

"Tourjay, old man, do you know that I don't like the way that fellow acts? he is too oily and smooth."

"Yes, the same idea occurred to me, he is too civil by half!"

"I am afraid that he is up to some little game."

It is possible, although I confess I don't see what kind of a trick he can work, excepting that in a few days he may come with the intelligence that he has changed his mind and must have the rest of the money which is due."

"And then you will have to raise it, of course."

"Yes, and although it may bother me a little, for I am mighty hard pushed for money just now, yet I think I can do it."

"I would help you out if I could, but my affairs are in a bad way now too," the veteran sport remarked reflectively.

"I saw by the newspapers yesterday that the banker in New Orleans where I kept the most of my cash has busted all to smash and levanted to parts unknown so that the people who had money in his hands will not be able to get a single dollar."

"Well, well! that is bad news indeed."

"You bet! And I had a tidy little pile in the rascal's hands too, but as there is no use crying over spilt milk I must make the best of it. I have a few hundred left, so I am not exactly down to the bedrock; still, things are in such a state that I must get a

hustle on me and get to work to make some money."

"Oh, you are all right!" Tourjay declared. "There isn't any doubt about your getting along. A man who can handle cards as you can need never be in want of money, and then you are wonderfully lucky."

"Yes, I usually manage to pick up enough to insure me a comfortable living," the gambler replied.

"But times are rather dull now up in this neighborhood, and although I have managed to ring into a few little games, I have not succeeded in making much money."

"Well, it is a fact that the men who do play do not seem to be inclined to go in very heavily."

"I have been thinking the matter over and have come to the conclusion that I must make a raise some way, and the thought came to me that it might be possible for you and I to make a stake together, if you were not too scrupulous in regard to the means."

The old sport had lowered his voice as he proceeded, and concluded in a tone little above a whisper.

Tourjay reflected upon the matter for a moment, a dark look upon his face, and then he said, being careful to speak in a low and cautious tone:

"Well, provided that the stake was big enough to be worth the trouble, and the risk was not too great, I don't think I would hesitate to go into almost anything just now, the way I am situated."

"There isn't much risk about the thing and the stake is a big one—big enough to be worth a deal of trouble."

"Go ahead and explain!"

"You have come to the conclusion that you do not stand a ghost of a show to get Miss Whaley?"

"Correct! In my opinion there is not one chance out of a million for me!"

"How would it do to put up a job and entrap the girl into a marriage?"

Tourjay reflected upon the matter for a few minutes, and then, with a dark look on his face, said:

"Such a scheme could be worked."

"Oh, yes, it has been done."

"It will have to be planned very carefully."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that."

"For if it did not succeed it would mean ruin to all concerned."

"Very true, but if the game is carefully arranged and the thing goes through all right, a big stake could be made."

"Yes, it seems probable."

"The plan must be arranged in this way: the girl must be carried off so that no one will know that she did not go of her own free will, then she can be placed under the influence of a drug and while in that state the marriage must take place."

"It ought not to be a difficult matter to find some man, legally qualified to perform the marriage ceremony, who will not be too particular in regard to the condition of the girl at the time when he is called upon to perform the marriage."

"I know where just such a fellow can be found," Tourjay declared.

"He is a regularly ordained minister, although at present without a church, for he is so fond of liquor that it is not possible for him to keep a pulpit."

"And such a man undoubtedly would not hesitate to perform a job of this kind if there was a good fat fee in it for him."

"Your judgment is correct in regard to that I think, for the man is so crazy for liquor, and so pressed for want of money, that a twenty-dollar note would be apt to overcome any scruples which he might possess."

"He is just the man that is required," the old gambler commented.

"As soon as the girl is carried off it must be given out that she has eloped with you; girls will do foolish things of this kind. It seems romantic to them to run off and get married, even when there isn't any reason for such a course."

"Oh, yes, it may seem unaccountable to those who know the girl best, but as you say, girls often yield to romantic notions of this kind," Tourjay observed thoughtfully.

"Then, after she is safely married to you and wakes to a consciousness of her position, two courses only are open to her."

"Yes, you are correct," the lawyer observed, thoughtfully.

"If she can get away from me, return to her father and proclaim that she has been the victim of a terrible plot. This story, of course, I shall deny, for I will claim that she went with me of her own free will, and knew exactly what she was doing."

"And the minister, too, will swear that she was married to you without making any objections to the union," observed the old gambler, with a sly chuckle.

"Oh, yes, he will swear to it fast enough, and in a case of this kind the odds are great that there will be as many persons in the community who will believe my side of the story as hers."

"Yes, yes, no doubt about that."

"One thing she cannot get over," Tourjay declared. "And that is that she is legally married to me and it will be a mighty difficult matter for her to get a divorce as long as I am prepared to fight the action."

"Almost impossible I should say."

"Now, on the other hand, if she is prepared to take a sensible view of the matter, I will say to her, I am sorry that I acted so hastily, but your coldness and indifference left no other course open to me."

"But if you are satisfied, though, that we can never be happy together and are anxious to have the marriage dissolved so that you can be a free woman again, I will not throw any obstacles in your way provided that you are prepared to make the proper pecuniary sacrifice to recompense me for my disappointment."

"Ah, yes, that is a very wise way of putting it," and the old sport rubbed his hands together gleefully and chuckled.

"Under such circumstances she ought to be willing to come up with a handsome sum—say from ten to twenty thousand dollars."

"Yes, not less than twenty thousand!" Tourjay declared.

"You are right! It certainly ought to be twenty thousand."

"The old judge is so rich that such a sum as that is a mere flea-bite to him. He can give the money and never miss it, while twenty thousand will set both you and I on our legs."

"You bet your life it will!"

"The scheme is a grand one, and if we have any luck at all, there isn't any reason why we should not make a success out of it."

"It is worth a trial anyhow."

"Decidedly so! And if we can only succeed in bringing the marriage about, no doubt the girl will be glad to buy her release, for I can arrange it in such a manner that there need not be much talk about the matter."

"I will explain to her that we will not be the first couple, nor the hundredth, who have run away and got married, only to discover after the ceremony was over and they have lived together for a few days, that they were not at all suited to each other, and that the quicker they separated the better off they would be."

"If she is at all sensible she cannot fail to quickly see that to pay the money will be the best way out of the scrape."

"I will at once commence to make arrangements!" Tourjay remarked, rising as he spoke.

"I have an apprehension that this old Jew means mischief."

"I cannot exactly explain why it is that I have the idea, except to say that there was something in his manner which gave me the notion."

"It is my opinion that you have come to a correct conclusion, for I got the same idea. Neither you nor I are innocent birds to be caught with chaff, and there was certainly something about the old Jew which boded danger."

"He will probably be after more money in a week or two, but if I have this affair moving ahead in the right way, I will be able to get along with him."

"The quicker you proceed the better."

"I will ride out to my plantation at once to start the affair."

Then the two departed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SURPRISE.

TOURJAY kept his horse in a shed at the back of his law office, so that inside of a

minute after leaving the apartment the lawyer was in the saddle and on his homeward road.

His plantation was only a half-an-hour's ride from the town, so it did not take the excellent beast which Tourjay rode long to cover the distance.

The lawyer felt rather jubilant over the prospect.

"This was a capital idea of the old sport's," he murmured as he rode along.

"But the major was always noted for being a wily old fox."

"The scheme is a great one and if we are lucky enough to be able to get the girl away all right, once we are safely married I shall be about as sure of the twenty thousand dollars as though the money was in my fist!"

As he concluded the sentence he laughed in his quiet way.

Then, all of a sudden his face clouded up.

"Hang that old Jew!" he exclaimed. "It is strange how the thoughts of that man seem to haunt me."

"I am not much of a believer in presentiments, yet there was something about that fellow which gives me the idea that his presence here is likely to bring misfortune to me."

And strive as hard as he could Tourjay could not drive the thoughts of the old Jew out of his mind during his homeward ride.

After he got to his plantation the lawyer donned a rough suit of clothes with a pair of big boots, pulled a slouch hat over his eyes and with a gun on his shoulder, just as if he was going on a shooting expedition, set out to hunt up the old fellow who had once been a minister of the Gospel in good standing.

Jabez Onderdonk the man was called, and after being driven out of his church on account of his bad conduct he had taken refuge with a small planter who had a run-down plantation situated a couple of miles from Tourjay's place.

This man was a cousin of the preacher and just about as hard a drinker as the erring minister.

He was an old bachelor and with the assistance of the minister worked the plantation without help.

The house of the Onderdonks was a lonely one; there wasn't another dwelling within a mile, and a better spot for the carrying out of a dark plot such as Tourjay had conceived could hardly be found.

If the girl could be got into the house she might scream to her heart's content without danger of her being able to alarm any one.

Tourjay found the Onderdonks in a bad way.

The planter had just returned from a visit to a neighbor from whom he had expected to collect the money for a mule which he had sold him, but the neighbor being short of cash had not been able to meet the payment.

Onderdonk's funds had run low and he was very much disgusted at the outlook when Tourjay arrived.

To the lawyer's inquiry as to how matters were progressing with him the planter made reply that things were fearfully blue, and then explained how affairs were.

Tourjay saw at once that things could not be in a better shape for his plans.

"Well, I am sorry that you are playing in such hard luck," he remarked in a sympathizing way.

"Durnest run of luck I ever struck!" the planter declared.

"Maybe, you wouldn't mind lending us a small stake for to help us out of this hole," Jabez Onderdonk remarked with an appealing glance at the lawyer.

"Oh, I am not the kind of man to see an old friend suffer if I am able to do anything for them!" Tourjay declared immediately.

And as he spoke he produced his wallet and taking out a ten-dollar bill handed it to the planter.

Both of the men were profuse in their thanks.

"Don't mention it!" Tourjay responded in his lordly way. "I am always glad to be able to oblige a friend."

Then he pretended to be struck by a sudden thought, tapped the side of his head reflectively with his fore-finger, glanced around with a thoughtful air, the Onderdonks watching him with a great deal of interest.

"By the way, an idea has come to me and I don't know but what I can put a little money in your way, if you are not too particular in regard as to how you get it."

"By Jinks! the way I am situated now I would do almost anything to get hold of a dollar if the risk wasn't too great!" the planter declared.

"Oh, we ain't particular now how we get the cash as long as there is a fair chance that we can avoid getting into trouble," Jabez added.

"Well, you will not run any particular risk in this matter," Tourjay replied, and then explained the scheme which he had formed, but he suppressed the fact that he was to play an active part in the matter, pretending that he was acting for a friend.

Neither one of the Onderdonks thought there was anything out of the way in the scheme; on the contrary they regarded the idea as being a particularly good one, and the disrobed minister expressed the opinion that it was as good a game as he had heard of for some time.

"There is fifty dollars in it for you," Tourjay observed.

"That will do!" Jabez Onderdonk declared. "We will do the job up in prime style for fifty dollars."

"I can't say exactly when the thing will come off, you know," the lawyer explained. "For it depends upon circumstances, but we will hurry it up as much as we can."

"We will be all ready at any time," the planter observed.

"Yes, you can come without warning, you know," Jabez added. "And as soon as I get the girl and the man before me I will tie the knot in a jiffy, and after it is once tied you can bet all you are worth that it will hold just as fast as though the highest dominie in the land officiated at the ceremony."

Tourjay replied that he had no doubt of it and then took his departure.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SURPRISE.

TOURJAY felt in a remarkable good humor as he proceeded on his homeward road.

"It was just as I anticipated," he soliloquized. "I did not think I would have much trouble in making an arrangement with the Onderdonks, and I had less than I expected, owing to their being short of cash."

"That is the first move in the game, and it has succeeded admirably, but the second is much more difficult, and I fear that it will require considerable hard work."

"It will not be an easy job to devise some way to lure the girl from her house and get her in such a situation that she can be carried off without her having an opportunity to make an outcry sufficient to alarm the neighborhood."

Then the arch-plotter pondered upon this matter for some time.

"It is going to be a very difficult task, indeed, but I have faith that I can do it, for as it will not be possible for the girl to have a suspicion that any evil threatens her she will not be on her guard."

By this time Tourjay had reached the neighborhood of his plantation, and as he came to the spot where the side road which led to his abode branched off from the main thoroughfare, he suddenly remembered that he had left his gun at the Onderdonk place.

He had leaned it against a tree when he took out his wallet to give the ten-dollar note, and came away without it.

"It does not matter," he remarked. "They will notice the gun, of course, and one of them will probably bring it over."

He had come to a halt upon remembering the gun, and now started on again, but before he had taken three steps a big, burly, determined-looking man, rather roughly-dressed, stepped out from behind a tree and confronted him.

Tourjay started in alarm, for there was something menacing in the appearance of the man.

"This is Mr. Alexander Tourjay, I believe?" the stranger said.

"Yes, that is my name."

"You are my prisoner, then," the burly fellow exclaimed, stepping forward and lay-

ing a heavy hand upon Tourjay's shoulder, the other being in his pocket and the lawyer immediately suspected that it grasped a weapon.

As a rule, Tourjay was a man who was not easily surprised, but on this occasion he was fairly astounded, for this arrest was entirely unexpected.

"What does this mean?" Tourjay asked. "Have you not made some mistake about this matter?"

"Oh, no, no mistake—that is if you are Alexander Tourjay?"

"That is certainly my name."

"Then you are the man I want."

"Have you a warrant for my arrest?" Tourjay asked, and as he spoke, there was a gleam of fire in his eye which seemed to indicate that he had a mind to make trouble.

"Oh, yes, I have the warrant all right and regular enough. I would not even dream of arresting a gentleman like yourself without the paper document to back up the proceeding."

Then he nodded his head—a signal evidently—for another man stepped from behind a tree-trunk.

The new-comer was the medicine peddler, Harvey Shock, who had sought for quarters at the cabin of the Blue Gum Swamp squatter.

As soon as he made his appearance he pulled a legal-looking document out of his pocket and unfolding it, presented it to the lawyer with a most polite bow.

Tourjay's face grew dark when the second man made his appearance, for he realized that he had fallen into a trap from whence there was little hope of escaping.

If he only had one man to contend with, there might be some chance for him, but with two in the field against him he did not stand any show.

The lawyer glanced at the warrant.

"Robbery and assault, eh?" he exclaimed, apparently very much surprised.

"That is the charge, sir," the stout man replied.

"Made by Herbert Fitzherbert," Tourjay continued, reading from the paper.

"Yes, sir."

"Has that Englishman taken leave of his senses, I wonder?" Tourjay exclaimed, in a tone of profound amazement.

"I really can't say, sir; you are entirely too much for me," the man responded, with a shake of his big head.

"I certainly think that he must be out of his mind or he never would have made such a ridiculous charge as this against me."

"Well, I can't say in regard to that, sir, for I am a stranger to this part of the country, and don't know anything about the people up in this region," the stout fellow replied.

"How may I call your name?" Tourjay asked, with a curious glance at the stranger.

"Bert Hazzleman; I am a detective from New Orleans, and am in the service of Mr. Nicodemus Tomlinson."

"Oh, and is it to that gentleman that I am indebted for this little surprise party?" Tourjay exclaimed, in a sarcastic way.

"I presume that it is, for I received the warrant from him and instructions how to effect your arrest," the detective replied.

"Well, all I have to say is that your principal has made the biggest kind of a blunder as he will find out before we get through with this affair."

"I sincerely hope, sir, that it will turn out in that way, for although it is my business to hunt men down yet I am always glad when a man succeeds in proving that he is innocent."

"There will not be any difficulty in my showing that this charge is utterly absurd!" Tourjay declared, in a lofty way. "And how such a ridiculous mistake could have occurred is a mystery to me."

"I really do not know anything about it, for the only connection I have with the affair is to execute this warrant, and in a matter of this kind, when I am dealing with a gentleman like yourself, I always try to be as easy and agreeable as possible."

"Now I am obliged to ask you to allow me to put on a pair of handcuffs."

Tourjay started and drew himself up to his full height while his face flushed crimson.

"Handcuff me!" he exclaimed, angrily.

"Yes, sir, I am sorry to be obliged to resort to such a measure, but now that I have succeeded in capturing you if you should manage to escape I would never hear the end of it," the detective remarked, speaking with the utmost politeness, but with extreme firmness.

"Will it be sufficient if I give you my word of honor that I will not attempt to escape?" Tourjay asked.

"I have never been exposed to such an indignity in all my life and I assure you that I would be willing to do almost anything to escape such a humiliation."

"Oh, yes, I will be satisfied to take your word, for I feel sure that a gentleman like yourself would not be guilty of breaking his word of honor."

"Be satisfied that I will not!" the lawyer declared.

"Will you permit me to go to my house so that I can change my clothes for more suitable attire?" Tourjay asked with a glance at his big boots.

"You will really have to pardon me for refusing, but I cannot do that," the detective replied.

"Now that you are arrested it is my duty to convey you before a magistrate as speedily as possible."

"Well, well, it does not make any particular difference!" the lawyer exclaimed in a petulant way.

"And I presume too that the quicker I get into a court so I will have an opportunity of showing how utterly ridiculous this absurd charge is the better."

"Yes, that is true enough, so if you please we will get a move on us," the detective remarked.

"You will not mind, I suppose, if I keep rather close to you," the sleuth-hound continued, "while my partner comes along in the rear."

"We always work the game in that way, so that if we happen to get hold of a slippery customer who shows a disposition to bolt, we will be able to get the best of him."

"I have no objections to offer, for it is wise for you, of course, to take all the precautions possible," Tourjay remarked.

"We don't do this on account of any lack of confidence in you," the detective explained in his civil way. "But we have always made it a rule to play the game in that way."

"That is all right; I am satisfied so long as you don't put the handcuffs on me," the lawyer remarked. "I confess that I should not like to be subjected to that humiliation, and I will be very much obliged to you if such a thing can be avoided."

"We will do anything in reason to oblige you, of course."

Again Tourjay thanked the detective, and then the three proceeded to Sulphurville.

Great was the astonishment of the citizens when they learned that Alexander Tourjay was accused of being the mysterious masked robber who had committed such outrages.

At first the people were inclined to be indignant, regarding the accusations as being a monstrous lie, but when Tourjay was examined before a magistrate, the evidence produced against him astonished everybody, and none was more surprised than the lawyer himself.

First came the Englishman, Herbert Fitzherbert, who admitted frankly that he had come to Sulphurville to play the role of a decoy, being employed by the New Orleans detective, Nicodemus Tomlinson.

It was his business to play the part of a rich man who always carried around with him a large sum of money.

The idea of this was to attract the robber and cause him to make an attack.

He had the number of all the bank-notes which he carried, so that if they were stolen they could be traced.

He was robbed by an unknown, and he gave the numbers of the bills which the robber carried off.

Then the old Jew, Solomon Vonderstein, came forward as a witness.

His testimony astonished everybody in the apartment, for he deposed that Alexander Tourjay in settlement of a claim which he had upon the lawyer had paid him in notes some of which had been stolen from the Englishman.

And now Tourjay saw that he had been caught in an extremely skillfully devised trap, which had been planned by the New Orleans detective.

Cunning and sharp as was the lawyer he had been tricked by the detective, who was a far better man than Tourjay had given him credit for being.

As soon as the old Jew finished his testimony there was hardly a man in the courtroom but what believed that Tourjay was indeed guilty of the crime with which he was charged.

The accused man was a keen reader of faces and he did not fail to notice that the old Jew's testimony had caused a complete revulsion of feeling.

Alexander Tourjay was game though and he did not allow any one to perceive that he was at all worried by the strength of this unexpected evidence.

On the contrary he smiled in the most confident way.

"Apparently there has been a very strong case made out against me," he said, speaking with an air of unconcern.

"But if you will take the trouble to notice, your Honor, the evidence is entirely circumstantial, and like all testimony of the kind is capable of being pulled all to pieces.

"The trap laid by this gentleman," and he bowed politely to Tomlinson, "was an exceedingly clever one, but the real culprit was cunning enough to evade it.

"These stolen notes were paid to me by a client, and I have witnesses to prove that this is a fact.

"How the man who paid them to me got possession of them I know not, but I can easily prove by competent witnesses that the notes were paid to me, and I in turn paid them out having no suspicion that there was anything wrong about them."

"Of course if you can prove that, Mr. Tourjay, the case against you will fall to the ground," the magistrate remarked.

"It will take some little time, of course," the lawyer remarked. "For I should like to get hold of the man who paid me the money, and it is my impression that he is absent."

"We will say this day two weeks for the trial," the magistrate observed. "Will that suit you?"

"Yes, sir, perfectly! That will afford me ample time," Tourjay replied.

Then he spoke about bail.

"Certainly, there can be no objection to that?" the magistrate answered with a questioning glance at Tomlinson.

"There is no objection on my part to the prisoner being admitted to bail," the detective replied.

And then he exploded a mine which astonished everybody in the apartment.

"The only point though upon which I must insist is that the bail be fixed at such a sum as will insure the appearance of the prisoner, for it is my opinion that unless the bail be put at a good round sum the chances are great that the prisoner will not appear."

Every one in the room was astonished by this announcement and Tourjay's face flushed with anger.

"I do not understand, sir, why you should hold such an opinion!" the lawyer exclaimed.

"The sum which I am accused of stealing is a small one, only about fifty dollars, and by rights a merely nominal bail is all that ought to be demanded."

"Ah, yes, but this charge is not the only one which I am going to bring against you," the detective replied to the intense astonishment of the hearers.

"I think I have secured evidence which will prove that you are the man who has committed all the mysterious robberies which have occurred in this section."

"The accusation is too absurd to require an answer!" Tourjay exclaimed, contemptuously.

"And I give you fair warning that I shall hold you personally responsible if you attempt to traduce my character."

"It has always been my rule to do my duty, no matter how high the station of the criminal might be, and threats, no matter how strong they might be, have never caused me to swerve from my path," Tomlinson replied.

"If you are a guilty man it is my duty to see that you are brought to the bar of justice."

"If you can succeed in proving that I and my agents have made a mistake, and you are unjustly accused, no one will be better pleased than myself."

"I think there must be some mistake about the matter," the magistrate observed.

"Mr. Tourjay is a man of position and standing, and as there is no doubt in my mind but what he will appear to meet this charge, I shall fix the bail at a nominal sum."

This was done and the proceedings came to an end.

CHAPTER XXX.

CALCULATING THE CHANCES.

FROM the court-room Tourjay repaired to his office.

He marched along with a proud and haughty mien, his head well up in the air, putting on a bold front, but for all that he was a sorely disheartened man.

In the privacy of his apartment he sunk into an easy-chair, and gave utterance to a deep groan.

"The infernal scoundrels contrived to entrap me in spite of all my caution!" the discomfited man exclaimed.

"The plot was so cunningly arranged, too, that I had no suspicion that danger threatened me, until it was too late to avoid the snare."

At this point Tourjay's meditations were interrupted by a tap on the door, then it opened and the old sport, Major Kaufman, appeared.

"Hello! is that you, major? come in!" the lawyer exclaimed.

The gambler entered and took a chair on the opposite side of the table to where Tourjay was seated.

"I saw you in the court-room, so you know how matters have gone," Tourjay remarked.

"Yes, and I am sorry to say that it is my impression that you are in a mighty bad hole."

"It certainly does have that appearance, but the situation depends entirely on how much evidence this Tomlinson and his gang have succeeded in securing."

"I know a good deal about this detective although this is the first time that I have ever met him," the old sport remarked in a reflective way.

"He has an office in New Orleans, but as he has for the last few years made a specialty of business in the Red River country he has acquired the name of the Red River Detective."

"I must acknowledge that I made a fearful mistake in regard to the man," Tourjay remarked in a thoughtful way.

"He completely deceived me," the lawyer continued.

"He was so open and above-board in the way he went to work that I made the mistake of thinking that the man didn't amount to anything."

"He is a wily customer and no mistake!" the major declared with a grave shake of the head.

"It was his game to give people the impression that he did not amount to anything so he would not be thought to be dangerous."

"As I told you, I know all about the man by reputation; he has the name of being an extra good detective, and his work in this case shows that he is a mighty smart fellow."

"Yes, he has got me in a tight place, and I shall, undoubtedly, have a good deal of trouble in getting out," Tourjay responded in a thoughtful way.

"It ought not to be a difficult matter for you to produce the man from whom you received the money," the gambler remarked, reflectively.

"But the trouble will be for the man to show how he came in possession of the money, for if he cannot give a clear account the natural inference will be that he was the man who committed the robbery."

"Yes, that is true."

"When I saw what your defense was going to be, I meditated over the affair and the thought came to me that I was just about the best man in the world to shoulder the responsibility."

"You?" Tourjay exclaimed.

"Yes, for I think I can fix up a tale which will pass current," the old gambler replied with a knowing smile.

"Well, I should not be surprised if you could, for you have always been noted for your shrewdness."

"Since I came to town I have done my best to get into all the little poker games which have been running, and so have encountered about all the strangers of a sporting turn of mind who struck the town," the gambler explained.

"Three nights ago there was a brisk little game in the hotel here, and there were four strangers in it who lost considerable money."

"They were on their way up the river, knew no one in the town and no one knew them."

"The boat they were on had something the matter with the machinery, and tied up here until the repairs were made."

"After the game ended the men went on board of the boat, and early in the morning she started up-river."

"I comprehend the game!" Tourjay exclaimed. "You got these particular bills from one of these men, then paid them over to me."

"Exactly! And as I won money from all four of the fellows it is not possible for me to say which one of the party it was who gave me the cash."

"That is a capital scheme and there isn't any doubt but that it will work."

"Yes, I think you will get out of this all right, but has the man succeeded in securing any other proof against you?"

"I don't think that it is possible," Tourjay replied in a thoughtful way.

"While the court-room business was going on I amused myself by calculating all the chances, and I am sorry to say I came to the conclusion that the outlook for you is by no means a rosy one."

"Yes, I agree with you," Tourjay replied.

"This infernal detective has gone to work to weave a regular web around me, and there is no telling what he has discovered."

"I have made some heavy payments during the last few months, trying to reduce my liabilities, and if I was suddenly called upon to show where I got the money I might have a difficulty in explaining."

"Of course I am not very well posted in regard to your affairs, but I got the idea that if you were subjected to a merciless cross-examination there might be some things which you would be troubled to explain."

"The situation depends altogether upon what information the detectives have succeeded in obtaining," Tourjay remarked in a thoughtful way.

"It is my impression that they have not been able to get much, but I thought the same in this case," he added.

"I made a mistake about that and it is possible I may be wrong in this supposition."

"The man went ahead as if he was sure that he had a good case against you, but of course, you can't always tell by that, for these detectives always play a bluff game."

"That is true, but the man succeeded in so completely astonishing me in the first place that I am inclined to be apprehensive that when the time comes he will succeed in making out so strong a case against me that I will have great difficulty in getting clear."

"And if you only manage to get off by the skin of your teeth it will ruin you in this neighborhood."

"Oh, yes, I shall have to emigrate. There isn't any doubt about that."

"Would it not be better then not to wait for the explosion?" the old gambler suggested.

"You are right!" Tourjay exclaimed decidedly.

"According to the present outlook the chances are all against me, and I presume the best thing I can do is to take French leave, and in some place, remote from this section, see if fortune will not smile more kindly on me than she has done for the past few years."

"I think that you are wise in coming to this determination."

"This is a big country and there is plenty of room in it for a man to lose himself," the old gambler continued.

"Suppose you take a trip to the Pacific

Slope or up to the Northwest, the chances are a hundred to one that no one will ever be able to find you even if pursuit is given."

"Yes, that is the game for me to try, but the main thing is for me to get some money to go ahead on."

"A bird can't fly without wings, you know, and neither can a man travel without money."

"There is ample time for you to make a raise," the major suggested.

"You have two weeks before your trial comes, and in two weeks a smart man can do a heap."

"That is correct, and I think we can pull off the scheme which we concocted in that time without any trouble."

"The one which concerns the girl?"

"Yes."

"You ought to be able to do it. Have you hit upon a plan?"

"I have."

"That is good!"

"In a case of this kind I don't believe in a man letting the grass grow under his feet, so, just as soon as I made up my mind that there was a chance for me to make a raise in that quarter I set my wits to work to devise a plan."

"That was wise!" the old gambler declared with an approving nod.

"And it is my experience that in all cases of this kind the more carefully the game is planned the better the chance of success."

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly, and I can assure you that I have taken great care in forming the scheme."

"As I told you I have not been much favored by fortune during the past year; in fact my luck has been decidedly against me, but now it seems to have turned a little."

"That is good, and I should regard that as a decidedly favorable sign."

"Yes, it looks like it. As it happens I am on very good terms with all Judge Whaley's servants, for just as soon as I made up my mind that it would be a good thing for me to marry the young lady I set to work to gain the good opinion of all the servants of the household."

"That was an excellent idea," the old gambler declared with an approving nod.

"And my best friend in the house is Miss Alberta's maid."

"Aha! she ought to prove a valuable ally, indeed."

"Yes, that was my idea. She is a French girl whom Miss Whaley got during her last trip to the North, and as she is a selfish, avaricious little monkey, I found no difficulty in enlisting her aid, and since the New Yorker, De Berry, made his appearance she has done her best to aid me."

"There are wheels within wheels, you know, and the hidden motives which inspire the actions of humans in this world are sometimes extremely strange."

"Now this girl has made up her mind that she will do all in her power to prevent the New Yorker from marrying Alberta, and I fancy that even if I did not pay her in the most handsome manner to do all she can to aid my suit, she would throw all the obstacles she possibly could in the way of the New Yorker."

"Some motive for acting in that way of course," the major observed.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that, and although one would hardly believe it, yet I am inclined to think that the maid has fallen in love with De Berry herself."

"Well, really, when you come to reflect upon the matter there isn't anything so very strange about the affair," the old gambler remarked.

"The New Yorker is a good-looking young fellow, and although there isn't one chance out of a million for the girl to get him, yet with the perversity of woman-kind it is only natural for her to do all she can to keep any other woman from getting him."

"That is true, but whatever the reason is she is doing all in her power to assist me."

"From her I have secured some very important information, and yesterday when I held a secret meeting with her and said frankly that I was afraid that I did not stand much chance to get the lady, she suggested that if I could not win by fair means that I ought to try foul."

"She must be an artful, unscrupulous baggage!" the major exclaimed.

"It is evident that when she makes up her mind to play a certain game she is one of the kind who will not allow anything to stand in the way."

"Of course I assented at once, said I would carry the girl off in a moment and force her into a marriage if I could only arrange a plan."

"And I am willing to bet a fortune that she suggested one!" the veteran sport exclaimed.

"You are right—she did."

"I thought so."

"And the scheme she suggested is a simple one, and it can be easily carried out, I think."

"That is good!"

"This maid, you must understand, is no chicken, a woman of thirty or thirty-five, although she is youthful looking and does not appear to be over twenty-five or six."

"She is French by birth, a foreign importation, and, I fancy, has seen a deal of the world."

"Very likely, for the majority of the French waiting maids are particularly sharp and artful."

"The scheme which she concocted is, as I said, an extremely simple one," Tourjay explained.

"At present Alberta is afflicted with a severe cold and it is her custom to take a dose of medicine each night before going to bed."

"Now it is the maid's idea to drug the cough medicine so that as soon as Alberta takes the dose it will at once produce insensibility."

"By Jove! that is a capital scheme!" the old sport exclaimed.

"Yes, so it appeared to me. Alberta's bedroom is in a wing of the house, and on the first floor; there is a door, too, leading into the garden."

"Yes, yes, I see your idea. After the girl takes the dose and becomes insensible, you can carry her away without much danger of alarming the household."

"Exactly! It is but a step from the room into the garden. Alberta never goes to bed until about ten o'clock, and by that time about all the servants have retired to rest, so there is very little danger of my meeting any one."

"You will give her a dose of the quick-acting stuff which the crooks in the big cities use, I suppose," said the old gambler.

"The knock-out drops as the fellows call the stuff."

"Yes, that is what I shall use. The dose produces insensibility almost immediately, and as she always takes the medicine as soon as she reaches the apartment, she will become insensible before she has a chance to remove any of her clothing, so I will be able to carry her away fully dressed."

"Ah, yes, I see, and that fact will be apt to make people think that she went with you of her own free will."

"That is the impression I am trying to produce, and the waiting-maid will give testimony to that effect."

"She will say that after her mistress entered the apartment, she was dismissed by her and that upon going in the morning, as usual, she was surprised to discover that she was not there."

"Yes, yes, a very nice little tale," the veteran sport declared, with a chuckle.

"And when do you propose to work this little game?" the major asked.

"This very night, if I can make the necessary arrangements, and I think I can, for I am to see the waiting-maid this afternoon."

"The quicker the better, it seems to me."

"Decidedly so, and you can rely upon my doing all I can to hurry matters forward, for I realize that there is no time to be lost."

"You are right! The quicker the job is worked, the better."

And this brought the interview to an end.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE NIGHT.

TOURJAY was an energetic fellow and when he had any business on hand always proceeded to execute it promptly.

And so in this case after he made up his mind in regard to how the game ought to be played he set about making the necessary arrangements.

The French waiting-maid proved to be a valuable ally.

The woman was totally unscrupulous, and as De Berry had treated her politely, as he did everybody, she had got the idea that if her mistress was out of the way she might succeed in fascinating the young man.

Of course the notion was absurd, but the woman was one who in her time had succeeded in attracting the notice of gentlemen far above her in the social scale, and as she had been the waiting-maid of noble ladies in the old country she had the idea that she was the equal of anybody in the republic where there was no nobility.

Under these circumstances then it was not strange that she entered eagerly into the scheme against Alberta Whaley.

After his interview with the waiting-maid, finding that she was disposed to do all in her power to aid him, Tourjay proceeded to make all the necessary arrangements for the abduction of the girl.

He had a close carriage—a two-seated affair, and after he had deposited the girl on the back seat, it would not be possible for any one in the darkness of the night to catch sight of her.

Of course he assumed that it was not likely that many would be abroad at so late an hour, and as the judge's house was located in the outskirts of the town he did not think it was likely he would encounter any one.

But in order to prevent his being recognized in case he did meet any one who knew him he put on a false black beard, an old suit of clothes, and drew a broad-brimmed slouch hat well down over his eyes.

Then too, when at half-past nine, he went to the stables to hitch up the rig, he was careful to attach to the carriage one of his brown mules, a beast without any particular marks by means of which he might be recognized.

Tourjay succeeded in harnessing the mule and driving away without attracting the attention of any of his negroes.

After eight o'clock it was not customary for anybody to be in the neighborhood of the stables.

Fortune seemed to smile upon the lawyer's desperate venture, for he succeeded in reaching the lane which ran along one side of the judge's place without encountering a single person.

The lane extended from the main road which ran in front of the judge's estate to a narrow thoroughfare which bounded the place on the south.

It was by the little-traveled back road that Tourjay intended to go after securing the girl.

There was small chance of his meeting any one on the main road, and almost none at all on the obscure back one.

The brown mule was a well-trained beast, who could be depended upon to stand without being tied, and so Tourjay had no hesitation in leaving the mule unhaltered.

He had come to a stop about a hundred yards in the rear of the house, so that if any one chanced to look out of a window in the mansion there was no danger of the mule and wagon being seen.

The night was a dark one, as the moon did not rise until late, and therefore all was favorable for the successful carrying out of the scheme.

From the lane the arch plotter had a good view of the windows of Alberta's apartment.

A signal had been arranged so that Tourjay would know the moment when the girl entered the room.

The maid had placed a lamp on a table by the rear window and as soon as Alberta entered the room the lamp was to be moved.

When Tourjay arrived the lamp shone distinctly through the window.

"I am in ample time then," the lawyer murmured.

But he had no sooner got the mule and carriage arranged to his satisfaction than the lamp was removed from the window.

"Aha! she has come!" Tourjay exclaimed.

And then he made his way toward the house, proceeding with all the caution of the red Indian stealing in on his foe.

He reached the neighborhood of the window, concealing himself behind a convenient clump of bushes.

As the curtains were he had a full view of the room.

Alberta was seated in an easy-chair and the maid had just given her a spoonful of the cough mixture when Tourjay became a witness of the scene.

Anxiously he watched, curious to see the effect of the drugged dose upon the girl.

Alberta swallowed the mixture, made a wry face, remarking to the maid in tones which were plainly audible to Tourjay's quick ears:

"I do not like 'medicine a bit, and I always hate to have to take the nasty stuff."

Hardly had the words left her lips though when the effects of the powerful dose began to be visible upon her.

Her head sunk back, her eyes became glassy and fixed, while her arms dropped listlessly to her side.

The French woman was watching her with hawk-like eyes.

Although she expected, of course, that the drugged dose would produce an effect of this kind yet she was amazed at its rapid workings.

Tourjay was equally surprised, but as soon as he saw that the girl was insensible he hurried to the door and tapped upon it.

The French woman hastened to open it. "It is all right—she is insensible!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I witnessed her take the dose through the window."

"*Mon Dieu!* never did I see anything like it in all my life!" she declared.

"It works with wonderful quickness, and although I knew the the drug was a powerful one, yet I did not think it would throw the girl into immediate insensibility."

"There is no danger, I hope, of its producing a fatal result?" the French woman asked with a look of apprehension upon her face.

"Oh, no, none at all!"

"For in that case both you and I would be in an extremely ugly scrape."

"Do not be alarmed, the insensibility is but a temporary one and when she recovers she will be as well as ever, excepting that she will probably be troubled by a headache for a while."

"I am glad of that for I do not want to get into any serious trouble."

"Do not fear, for there isn't any danger of that happening," Tourjay declared.

"And now bring her cloak and hat and we will be off!"

The French woman hastened to prepare the girl for her journey, and as soon as she was ready Tourjay raised Alberta in his arms and carried her to the carriage.

The arch plotter deposited the girl on the back seat and taking his place on the front one drove off.

So far all had gone on well and Tourjay laughed as the carriage proceeded at a good pace through the darkness.

"The chances are good that I will succeed in this venture!" he exclaimed.

"And if I do manage to get hold of a good bit of money I will bid the neighborhood of the Red River a long farewell!"

It had been arranged that Major Kaufman should wait for the wagon at the junction of the lane with the back road, and when the carriage arrived at that point the old sport got on board.

"Not a soul has passed," he said.

"We shall do the trick without any trouble, I think," Tourjay observed.

"We ought to be able to get enough out of it to set us up in good style."

"Yes, and I don't think there is a doubt but we will, unless some unforeseen accident occurs to upset our plans."

"We have arranged the game so carefully though that it does not seem hardly possible anything can happen to beat us."

As will be seen from these remarks the pair were in extra good spirits over the success of their plans.

On they went through the darkness to the house where the disgraced minister waited to perform his part of the plot.

It was only about half an hour's drive, and as they did not encounter anybody on the road, the plotters felt that fortune was smiling on them.

The minister with his relative as a witness, the major being the other, was all in readiness to perform the ceremony.

The girl was placed in an old high-backed rocking chair, still insensible, still perfectly helpless.

"Now, then, we will hurry the thing right forward," the minister said. "For the quicker we get through with it the better."

"Take her hand in yours, Mr. Tourjay, and in a brace of shakes I will jine you together in the bands of wedlock."

The lawyer clasped the hand of the insensible girl and the unworthy dominie began the marriage service.

But before he had said half a dozen words the door was violently thrown open and the three detectives, Tomlinson, Shock and Hazzleman entered, followed by Judge Whaley and De Berry.

The detectives flung themselves upon Tourjay, but he managed to get out his revolver; in the struggle it was discharged and the ball entered the lawyer's head killing him instantly.

The major was too wise to attempt to resist.

Our story is told.

It was Tourjay who had been preying upon his neighbors, urged to a life of crime by his need of money.

The detectives had got on his track in a short time after they took the case and had kept a close watch on him.

In due time the New Yorker married the Southern belle and carried her away to his Northern home.

Tourjay met the fate which almost always comes to the evil-doer, thanks to the Red River Detective.

THE END.

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